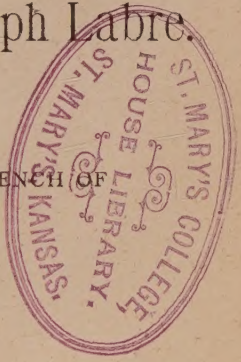
LIFE OF
BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE

A

HOLY MENDICANT;

OR

Life of Benedict Joseph Labre.



TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF
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and a mother, of God, of His amiability, of His greatness and of His purity; she taught them to discern between good and evil, to choose the better part, to love God above all things, for He is love itself, the

A HOLY MENDICANT

OR,

LIFE OF BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD.

IN 1748 Europe was in a blaze, for war had broken out in several kingdoms. Charles VI., Emperor of Austria, had just died, leaving a daughter, Maria Theresa, whose head was to wear the crown. The *pragmatic sanction*, accepted and signed by the princes interested in the succession of the late Emperor, confirmed that right. But France, represented by Louis XV., wished to place Charles Albert, Elector of Bavaria, upon the Imperial Throne. Prussia and Poland, sharing the same views, united with France, and sent their armies to the Rhine and towards the Alps.

In the midst of this universal conflagration, BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE, was born in the little village of

But Benedict Joseph, in particular, was remarkable for the scrupulous care with which he practiced the lessons taught him by his good mother, and for the edifying manner in which he followed the excellent example set before him. The austerity of the christian education which he received at the home fireside, but which was softened by all that is sweet and affectionate in a mother's heart, developed that extreme tenderness of soul, and at the same time that manly and generous character that distinguished him in later years.

The blessed child made the sign of the cross, and lisped the holy names of Jesus and Mary, when in the cradle. Although only five years old, that happy and charming age when evil is yet unknown, he was penetrated with a great fear of God, and felt within himself a singular aversion, for the slightest faults.

"One day," an eye witness, the curate of his parish, tells us, "having seen him pick up a large hammer in a barn, I called him a *little thief* in jest. The child took it seriously to heart, and shed abundant tears; nothing could console him for the pretended theft."

This charming ingenuousness already foreshadowed the great purity of heart and extreme delicacy of conscience, which were to be later the precious lot of Benedict Joseph, when grown to manhood!

The village church was for him a second home; his mother had taught him to respect it and love it even more than that in which he had received life. Every

day, as soon as convenient, disregarding the sports attractive to those of his age, he would leave his noisy companions, to go to the foot of the altar, and there give to Our Lord, hidden in the tabernacle, what he called in his grave and simple language, *his respects*. Kneeling with his hands joined and his head bowed upon his breast, motionless, rapt in contemplation and already indefatigable in his prayers, he belonged entirely to God, and to God alone. One would have thought him a statue in the attitude of adoration, or rather one of those seraphim, which faith shows us hovering round the sacred tabernacle with love and respect.

The inhabitants of the hamlet, astounded at so much piety and wisdom in so young a child, flocked to the church to see the angel that heaven had sent upon earth.

The most pious among them were enraptured, the most indifferent were touched; and after beholding the holy youth, they carried away with them a delicious perfume that embalmed and rejoiced their souls. Benedict Joseph however, saw nothing, heard nothing. It would seem that distractions had no hold on his imagination, that quality, which in others, is so fickle and changeable.

Permitted to participate in the ceremonies of Catholic worship, he behaved with gravity and perfect modesty. To be an altar-boy was for him a happiness above all other happiness. How good it was to see him around the altar offering the incense, carrying the

water and wine required for the Holy Sacrifice. Like another Eliacim, Benedict, clothed in linen robes, pious and recollected, showed every one how deeply he was penetrated with the ceremonies which were being performed under his eyes, and how much he appreciated the honor that had been conferred upon him.

All the sentiments of his soul were apparent in his exterior, but especially the happiness, with which his heart was overflowing, beamed upon his countenance and seemed to cast a halo of glory around his forehead.

After the Holy Sacrifice, and his return home, he would himself set up an altar in a corner of the room, adorn it with flowers and evergreens, then secure from all intrusion, alone in the presence of God, he would perform the functions of a priest and say the prayers of Mass. "He went through this exercise," says one of his biographers, "with so much gravity that he turned into acts of devotion what would have been only play in another."

This ardent piety—like all true and sincere piety—had nothing unsociable about it. Benedict Joseph was gracious and amiable; there was nothing sad or constrained in his manner. He had an even disposition, and never refused to join in the sports of his little comrades; but his laugh was modest and restrained. "He was so amiable," says Francis d'Hautel, then assistant at the Parish of Amette, "and I expected so much from him, that although it is twenty-

eight years since he left me, I have never forgotten him."

Being of a quick and passionate nature, he carefully avoided the animated games which attracted him, and he fled from children who were too unruly and too turbulent. Kind and affable towards every one, he preferred the company of pious and serious persons. Even with the latter he spoke but little, always watching himself so as to moderate the impulses of his ardent nature.

His conversations, to borrow a word from the Gospel, were not of this world. Children generally speak of play or games, trifles or pleasure, but he spoke of God, of the Church, of religious ceremonies, and of Heaven.

The least unbecoming remark against virtue or neighbors, caused a blush to rise to his cheek and tears to his eyes.

One day, when in the country, he heard some young men blaspheming horribly. Sad and grieved, he withdrew, and his eyes falling upon a cross standing at a turn in the road, he went and knelt before it, and prayed for the unfortunate sinners.

His thoughts naturally turned heavenward; his mother had often told him, his home was there, and that it was the long promised sojurn of all those who did good in this world.

And his heart becoming inflamed with the meditation of the happiness in store for us all, he was heard to exclaim, when he thought himself alone, and even

in his sleep: "O my God! when shall I go to Thee!" Having seen one of his little sisters die who was only a few months old, Benedict remained more than an hour gazing intently at her body. Raising his eyes to heaven he sighed and said: "Dear little one! Thou art blessed and to be envied! Why am I not as happy as thou?"

Even at this early age he commenced to inure himself to the practice of those austere virtues which are the brightest gems in his crown, viz.: self-denial, mortification of the will and the senses. More than once his parents were obliged to interfere and restrain his ardor for penance.

The coarsest food, black or dry bread, water from a running brook, were his choice articles of food. Whenever he received luscious fruit, or any other dainty, he quickly divided it, if not seen by any one, among his brothers. Generally, he chose the smallest ones, not that he preferred them to others, but because he knew that being able to speak but little, they would more faithfully keep his secret. In his indifference to all the comforts of life, it mattered little to him whether his couch were soft or hard. It even often happened that according to the example of our Divine Master, who had only a stone on which to rest His head, he would place a small board across his pillow so as not to sleep too comfortably.

Were his clothes hanging in shreds, he would never think of asking for new ones. And if his little comrades—youth is so pitiless!—played tricks on him, he

kept silence, happy thus to show his love for God; or else, he was the first to excuse them, attributing everything to a mistake or to an involuntary accident.

As we can easily understand, so many virtues gave Benedict Joseph great authority over his brothers and sisters. The holy child used it to draw these young souls towards God, piety and all good and holy things.

With wonderful devotion, he guided their footsteps in the paths of virtue, by his advice which came from his pure and loving heart, occasionally by his remonstrances which were softened by his sympathetic voice and the sweet smile on his face, and always by his generous example. Undoubtedly it was this modest and charming school, that a few of his brothers first felt the desire to consecrate themselves to the service of the Church, as priests of Jesus Christ, and the strength to realize it.

This was a magnificent reward for his zeal and charity, and it remained until his dying day, one of the sweetest consolations of his life.

In fact, three of his brothers received Holy Orders, and when the Revolution broke out a few years later in France, they warmly embraced the cause of religion and rendered it signal services, first, in the land of exile by succoring immigrant priests, then at Amette, by keeping at a distance from the parish, by their presence alone, all the inroads of the constitutional schism.

These were not the only levites that God had chosen for Himself in the bosom of this truly privileged

family. He had already come more than once to knock at their door. Several uncles of the saint were precisely at this time exercising the sacerdotal functions in the neighboring parishes and communities, in the dioceses of Boulogne, St. Omer and Cambray. One of them, James Vincent, then a sub-deacon, was Benedict's first teacher, as he taught him his letters.

I have just mentioned the word letters. At five years of age Benedict knew how to read; he was truly happy whenever he spelled the *Lord's Prayer* or the *Hail Mary*, and during the hours of recreation, he delighted in reading pious books.

The wicked who take such an interest in reviling virtue, have repeated to satiety that Benedict Joseph was entirely deprived of understanding; so much abjection, so much humility seemed to them compatible only with extreme stupidity.

No, no; Benedict was neither stupid nor half-witted, on the contrary, in childhood, he showed remarkable aptness for study. His precocious intellect possessed something clear and quick, which was reflected in his eye, and brightened his features. "Out of two thousand scholars that I have governed," said one of his teachers, Francis Joseph Forgeois, "I have seen none endowed with so many qualities."

This bright intellect, seconded by an excellent memory, Benedict Joseph cultivated by increasing study. A moment lost, was, for him, a subject of vexation.

One day he was about to study his catechism, when

his master, who liked to amuse him, held him on his knee. "Please, master, let me go," said the little scholar, "I shall not know my lesson." "But if you do not know it this time, I will not punish you, since I shall be the cause." "That is true; nevertheless, it will be a lesson lost," replied the studious child.

At school, his meekness and punctuality always won for him the respect and affection of his teacher "I do not remember," said one of these, Bartholomew Francis Delmé, "ever having reprimanded him." Even his schoolmates were quite deferential, which is rather uncommon, perhaps I ought to say, an unheard of thing among these little folk. His presence alone sufficed to arrest ill-sounding words on their lips, and to banish from their imaginations all thoughts which did not harmonize with duty. Benedict could control the scholars, when a look or words from the master were ineffectual in maintaining order.

Thus passed Benedict's childhood, under the eye of God. His soul, fragrant with the perfume of innocence and mortification, foreshadowed future years of piety and holiness.

Is not such a beautiful dawn the herald of a serene and radiant day?

CHAPTER II.

HIS FIRST COMMUNION.—YOUTH.

HE inhabitants of Amette admired the extraordinary virtue they remarked in Benedict, and all were convinced that God had chosen this charming child for his own, and destined him to one day become a priest.

One of Benedict's uncles, who was also his godfather, Father Francis Joseph Labre, pastor at Erin, was certain as to the sacerdotal calling of his pious nephew, and he decided to do all in his power to second the designs of Providence.

But he had to overcome the objections of his parents. Undoubtedly, they both agreed to accept God's will concerning their son; but they could not make up their minds to deprive themselves of his help. Benedict Joseph was now twelve years old, and already of great assistance in the house; his parents counted upon soon sharing their cares with him. Their family was large, and their income, as we know, very small. It consisted in a few acres of land, and the proceeds of a small trade. But their eldest son

was growing; in a short time, he would reach manhood, and be able to relieve them of the great burdens that weighed upon their shoulders. Besides, in order to educate him for the priesthood, it would be necessary to impose great sacrifices upon themselves and family. All these obstacles arose before Benedict's parents, and prevented them from undertaking the sacerdotal education of their son.

Father Francis Joseph Labre finally triumphed over all these objections, and he took his godson to Erin, promising to provide for his board and tuition. Benedict's family had only to furnish his modest wardrobe.

Before placing a classical book in his pupil's hands, the pastor of Erin wished to strengthen and complete his religious instruction. He was persuaded, and with reason, that the science of religion, raised as a torch to illuminate the threshold of education, is necessarily of great help to it; first, because it places it under the protection of heaven; and secondly, it destroys the natural indolence of our mind, by pointing out work, as law imposed on all mankind, by the Divine Creator.

Sacrificing his life for his flock, the pious and zealous priest, Francis Joseph Labre, was well qualified to speak of God to his angelical godson. He devoted himself most particularly to the development of those beautiful germs of piety and information which Benedict possessed. He was not only satisfied with teaching him the truths of religion, but expounded its dogmas and explained the sense of its ceremonies. He was especially careful to teach him to admire

God's love for man in the creation of the world, in the word Incarnate and in the Holy Eucharist. When thus instructing Benedict Joseph, the holy priest's soul seemed to tremble on his lips, and his speech, impregnated with the ardent charity with which he was burning, became sweetly eloquent. His godson, attentive and deeply moved, could scarcely restrain his tears. Then uncle and nephew would kneel before the crucifix that witnessed their sublime conversations, and bless, praise, and adore their Heavenly Father. The mysteries of the Crib, of Calvary, of the Tabernacle, which are not understood by sinful hearts, how could they do aught but deeply touch those two virgin souls free from the shame of sin and the corrupting dross of the earth!

The day of Benedict Joseph's first Communion was fast approaching. It is a day of inexpressible joy to every christian, a day in which the Church, family, and I might say society itself, inspired by faith, surround the child, whose heart is for the first time, to become the dwelling of its God.

Benedict Joseph was particularly careful and attentive in preparing his general confession. He was ready; for the innocence in which he had been clothed at his baptism, had not been tarnished.

Jesus was to be the first guest to be ushered into his virginal heart. Neverthless the perfect holiness of Him he was about to receive, when compared with his own misery and unworthiness, threw him into a state of great uneasiness.

To purify himself more and more from his crimes, as he called them, he had recourse to prayer; imposed new privations upon himself, and meditated perseveringly upon subjects most likely to touch his heart, and was entirely submissive to the voice of his confessor.

Thus divided between joy and fear, Benedict hailed the happy day of his first Communion, which was on September 4th, 1761.

The church bells pealed fourth loudly, announcing to all that it was great a feast day at Erin. The altars were beautifully decked with garlands and flowers.

Modestly and recollectedly, Benedict Joseph surrounded with all the pomp of religion, accompanied by the good wishes of the whole parish and the blessings of his family, approached the Holy Table, and united himself to God.

Who can relate the holy emotions that the Blessed Eucharist awakened in this child, dazzling with grace and purity?

In communion with his Savior, Benedict felt increasing within his heart that love for poverty and humiliation we have already remarked in him, and which will henceforth appear to us as his predominant virtue.

Benedict Joseph was confirmed the same day by the Bishop of Boulogne, Francis Joseph Gaston de Partz de Pressy. He was then prepared to face the contempt of the world and seductions of the earth. Benedict was armed for the struggle.

As soon as Benedict had made his first Communion, Father Francis Joseph Labre, devoted himself to giv-

ing his dear nephew the first lessons in Latin. During this daily contact the master became better acquainted with the rare qualities of his pupil, and they became more and more attached to each other.

Benedict listened to his uncle with the most scrupulous attention, perhaps I ought to say, with the greatest respect. He longed to understand the Holy Scriptures and the office of the Church.

His progress was truly wonderful. His mind had early reached maturity. In him, remarkable facility was united to obstinate perseverance.

When his class was over, he would hasten to shut himself up in a room that contained the library of the rectory, and there study the lessons just given him.

It is seldom that a young scholar left to himself, secure from the teacher's scrutiny, and within reach of forbidden amusements, will choose as reading matter, the dry and arid work he has been ordered to study. Generally—and undoubtedly the time in which our saint lived, closely resembled the time in which we live ourselves; — generally a young student will feel more inclined to story books, for they are more attractive. Having choice between "Cornelius" and "Robinson Crusoe" or even "Perrault's Fairy Stories," he will not hesitate an instant. He will throw far from him, the book that contains an unknown language, and devour with avidity the pages that relate strange adventures, which cause him to cry and laugh by turns, and make him forgetful of all that surrounds him.

Benedict Joseph left all such story books sleep in their dusty case; classical books alone tempted him and were his greatest delight.

Neverthless, his wonderful taste for study, did not interfere with the pious aspirations of his soul, which is, perhaps, something unusual. As his talents developed, his faith became more deeply rooted in his heart, and his love for God assumed a more tender character, whilst his craving for mortification became pronounced. The germs of grace, planted in his soul at the baptismal font, blossomed during this holy season of his life; and the fruits of virtue which it bore later in life, were already visible in a rich and abundant florescence.

From the day of his first Communion, when he felt how sweet the Lord is to the fervent soul that receives Him, Benedict Joseph, always sighing for divine nourishment, disdained, so to speak, all material food and despised it.

Seated at the table with his uncle, by means of a thousand innocent stratagems, he would deprive himself of the best and most savory dishes. He remembered the poor of the village, and kept his share for them. He gave them for rendezvous, a window on a secluded side of the house, surrounding his charity with as much mystery as others do their weak and shameful actions.

As for himself, he was satisfied with the worst and coarsest pieces. Sometimes he did not even take as much food as he required, and his uncle

was often obliged to reprimand him seriously on this subject.

Had he been free, he would have observed to the letter, the laws for fasting, which were then much more severe than at the present day; but he always met with firm resistance on the part of the pastor of Erin. Still he knew how to make up for those penances which his age, and the vigilant eye of his uncle denied him. Under one pretext or another, he would not wait to finish his meals, and leaving the venerable priest, who laughed within himself at the pious ingenuity of his godson, he would go to the foot of the altar which he had erected in his room, and there return thanks to God for the success of his little plan.

But when he was sixteen years of age, his uncle was obliged to yield to his wishes, and permit him to observe the precepts of the Church.

To his love for austerities, Benedict Joseph united great love for justice. He knew he was in his uncle's house and not at home, therefore he never pemitted himself to be tempted by any of those, delicacies which young people are so fond of.

A small garden, surrounded by a stone wall, adjoined the rectory. It was a little paradise. A beautiful grape arbor extended from one end of the enclosure to the other; superb fruit trees were planted here and there; strawberry beds filled with their fragrant produce; currant bushes laden with crimson berries; clusters of lilies and other flowers created a very pleas-

ing effect. Benedict Joseph, with a book in his hand, often came here to while away his leisure hours. Bunches of luscious grapes touched his pure white brow; the savory fruit of the pear and apple tree, hung within reach of his hand; but he never touched any of them. He knew that he might not dispose of anything without his uncle's permission.

One day, as he was busy gathering strawberries, a little girl, Austreberte Desplanques, entered the garden and begged of him to give her a few berries. Benedict would have given them willingly, but he said he was not the owner, that the fruit belonged to his uncle. The child, a true daughter of Eve, finding the strawberries very tempting, insisted, assuring him that it was only a slight peccadillo, and that his uncle would know nothing of it. Benedict then gravely answered: "My little miss, God would know it, and that suffices." He then advised her to confess herself as soon as possible of the bad advice she had given him.

These words made such an impression upon the little girl, that she remembered them ever after. Later, having become a lay sister at the Ursulines of Boulogne, she related this charming incident in the life of our saint.

The same as at Amette, Benedict possessed great influence in the parish of Erin. We can easily understand it. Virtue, with its divine halo, is always, even in the eyes of the most impious, a beautiful and admirable thing, but it is especially lovely in the spirit-

ed young man, who, bearing upon his brow the impress of fifteen or sixteen years, has reached that perilous and charming age when the heart expands; but, alas! how quickly does that age fade away like a flower! Naturally we are often won by its amiable smile, and fascinated by its beautiful aspect. On Sundays, Benedict usually joined the groups that gathered in front of the church, and took part in the conversations. Every one was pleased to meet the holy youth, the *little priest*, as he was named by the Princess de Croy, who was "first lady of the district," for so she was styled. He was also called the little priest by the inhabitants of Erin.

The *little priest* admirably filled the part which this new title imposed upon him. With perfect grace and angelic modesty and sweetness, he gave good counsel to one, tender reproaches to another, and spoke to all of what might interest them; but he always returned to his favorite subjects, viz.: God, the Blessed Virgin, the ceremonies of the Church, the happiness of innocence and repentance. His heart was full of all those things, and his mouth, to use the words of the holy Epistle, spoke from the abundance of his heart. How many times his presence alone put a stop to silly conversations, and even prevented little disturbances. Still—we have already remarked it—we must not think that Benedict Joseph always looked severe, and carried with him withersoever he went, that sternness or that harsh and austere gravity that is often wrongfully ascribed to virtue. On the contrary, Benedict

was very cheerful, and never refused to enjoy himself. He carefully avoided everything resembling strangeness; he was even charmingly condescending. On this subject, we may be allowed to relate one among a thousand other incidents, of his truly beautiful life.

On a certain occasion, Erin was celebrating its patronal feast of *Ducasse*, according to the language of the country. On that day the different members of the family, scattered here and there in the environs, returned to the paternal mansion. Together they sat down to the same table, reciprocating tokens of mutual affection with touching animation. Together they knelt at the same altar. Together again, in the evening, they gathered on the neighboring lawn. The whole village was there. It was the time for games and amusements. The Revolution had not yet appeared to cast a pagan coloring over everything; it had not yet given to France that taste for disorderly pleasures, noisy and scandalous feasts, that too often mar our most religious ceremonies.

On this occasion, Benedict Joseph remained in his room, and there, in quiet, far from all the outside noise, he was communing with God, when suddenly his uncle entered, and commanded him to go out on the green and share with his companions in the sports and amusements of the day. Obedient as an angel, Benedict consented, and quickly joined his young friends. He actively took part in their play, stimulated their ardor, and organized new games. He came and went, exciting one and coaxing another. But

when all were engaged and given up to joy and pleasure, he left the lawn, convinced that he would not be missed. He retired to a barn, where he fastened a crucifix to the wall, then resumed his meditations, which had been interrupted for a few moments by his uncle. It was difficult for this young man to repress for any length of time, the attraction that drew him to God!

Benedict Joseph, as we have already said, cared for the study of the Latin language, only in so much as it would enable him to read the books of the New and Old Testament. This desire was soon accomplished. After a comparatively short time, Benedict read, with inexpressible joy, the sacred pages, but, this reading which inflamed his heart, rendered him insensible to the beauties of the pagan authors

Deeply penetrated with the strong maxims, the sublime counsels of true wisdom, he was filled with disgust for the fables and frivolous inventions of human reason. The grand characters of the ancient law, such as Abraham, Job, David, and Judith, caused him to despise the pagan heroes, such as Achilles and his soldiers, Eneas and his companions, Cæsar and his legions. The grand truths contained in the Gospel, concerning God, man and eternity, led him away from the teachings of ancient philosophy, which he found foolish and deficient. Cicero and Virgil could command pure, graceful and flowery language, but Benedict Joseph, following the example of St. Bernard thought them insipid and tiresome, because the name

of Jesus was not written on their pages. He was always happy to return to the holy Epistles, and to the ascetic authors, even the most inferior. In these only did he find food in harmony with the requirements of his soul.

s a natural consequence, his studies began to suffer, and the pastor of Erin considered himself obliged to reprimand his pupil, and tell him how extremely important it was that the priest should possess the knowledge which he was neglecting to acquire.

The holy youth did his utmost to fulfill the wishes of his uncle, but his inclination was stronger than his good intentions.

There was one author in particular, of which Benedict never tired, viz.: P. Lejeune, called the *Blind Man.* His lectures on the pains of hell, and on the small number of the elect, affected him deeply, and to such an extent, that some of his biographers think they can attribute his resolution to join the Trappists, to the reading and meditation of these profound thoughts. "Were only one soul to be damned," said Benedict Joseph, "should we not fear to be that one?"

CHAPTER III.

BENEDICT'S TRIALS IN SEEKING HIS VOCATION.

HENCEFORTH the holy child's only care was to avoid hell.

Being now sixteen years old he remembered the promise made him, that when he had reached that age, his inclination for suffering and mortification, should no longer be restrained. Accordingly, it was with the greatest joy he received permission to enter the road to Calvary; the only one that does not lead to regions of darkness.

He increased two-fold his penance and mortification. Therefore, it was not only a portion of his meals that he distributed to the poor, but the entire repast.

His bed, on which, from his childhood, he never failed to place a hard board, seemed to him, when thus arranged, too soft, and even too luxurious; therefore, he passed the night, whether in winter or summer, stretched on the bare floor of his room.

The world with its pleasures and foolish joys which he always disliked, he now regarded with abhorrence; he dreamed only of solitude and abnegation.

The word which Our Savior formerly addressed to a young man who like our saint, sighed only for heaven: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead," were always ringing in his ears, in the midst of his classical studies, during his walks in the country, and in the quiet of his modest cell.

But where should he go? Which monastery had the strictest rule? Which order was considered the most trying to human nature? These questions passed and repassed through Benedict's mind, but he did not know how to answer them. When with his uncle or priests of the vicinity, he often adroitly turned the conversation on this important matter according to his own point of view. But the answers he received did not seem to satisfy the thirst for mortification that was in his heart.

In the meanwhile, a priest, as though lead by the hand of God, came to the rectory of Erin; he had just visited the great Trappist Monastery. Benedict Joseph did not allow such a good occasion to escape him; he hastened to ask the venerable traveller details of the life and rule of the trappists.

The priest, delighted with the request, for he himself, was charmed with all he had seen and heard, spoke enthusiastically of all the frightful austerities of the good monks, of the peace pictured in their faces, of the modesty of their demeanor, and of the profound calm the human soul enjoys under their holy roof.

The enthusiasm of the traveller told on Benedict, it

seemed to him that a divine voice called him to La Trappe. Everything appeared to suggest that course, viz., the arrival of this priest, whilst he himself was seeking for a severe and crucifying rule; his ardor in relating the wonders that he had just witnessed. And with childish ingeniousness, he hastened to his uncle to acquaint him with his sudden vocation.

On learning this, Abbé Francis Joseph Labre endeavored to combat a determination, which, nevertheless, seemed to him, to be in harmony with the tastes of his dear nephew, with his love for silence and mortification, and his indifference for classical studies.

But he dreaded the illusions of an excited imagination, or a movement of indiscreet fervor. "You are too young," said he. "Be careful not to follow hastily the enthusiastic impulse of the moment. Your constitution is very delicate,—very weak. Could you follow such a severe rule? Do you not fear to tempt God? Take time to reflect." Benedict Joseph had a ready answer for all his objections. He was acquainted with the life led at La Trappe, even to the minutest details. He was not afraid of it. He knew the site of the monastery, the road which led to it, and the number of days required to reach it. Moreover, the power of God is greater than all obstacles. He can perform miracles for His servants. With His Grace, everything is possible to us.

The parish priest no longer hesitated; he concluded that, from all appearances, this was a true call from God; he did not even wish to test Benedict's admira-

ble intention, he only remarked to him, that in all things, especially when it was a question of choosing a vocation, parents should be consulted.

Benedict, for whom obedience had always been an easy and familiar virtue, started immediately for Amette. He had not been there for four years.

His father and mother did not approve of his new determination, for, they had formed the idea that one day their child would replace his uncle in the parish of Erin; that, once there, he could help his brothers and sisters, direct and advise them, in the trials of life; that perhaps one day, they themselves would go and live with him under the same roof. And this scaffolding, which had been erected with so much labor, and so fondly caressed, suddenly gave way, as a dream vanishes when conciousness returns. They endeavored in vain to shake Benedict's ideas and resolutions. "Would it not be better," said they, "for him to edify the world by his virtues, than to go and bury himself alive within four walls, and selfishly keep for himself alone, his treasures of holiness and merit?" His mother, in particular was grieved, and poured fourth her lamentations. "Could her dear child, whose health was so delicate, endure a life of privations and sacrifices? Would it not soon be shattered by so many austerities and sufferings?" And finally, (parents—even the most christian—are so skillful in covering with an honest veil, their secret resistance to an unexpected vocation that disturbs all their plans!) she pointed out to him the im-

mense services he could render the Church and Society, thanks to his intelligence and labor.

Benedict Joseph remained immovable. The tears of his mother, the tender reproaches of his father, touched his heart, which was extremely sensitive; but nothing could destroy the attraction that drew him towards La Trappe. He answered all the alleged reasons, with the greatest mildness, tenderness, and patience. "It is the will of God that forces me," said he. "According to that call the voice of nature must be silenced."

His parents were inflexible, and thinking that time, would destroy in their son, what their tears and prayers could not make him forego; they declared to him that they would oppose the execution of his designs until he became of age. He might then dispose of his person.

Benedict therefore returned to Erin, a prey to great sadness as may be easily imagined. He saw himself obliged to resume his classical books, and his literary studies; more than ever, he experienced in his heart a profound dislike for all that was not God, or, that did not speak to him of God. Nevertheless, without the least murmur, he submitted, silencing his dearest aspirations, but, sighing most ardently for the day when he would see them realized.

Two years passed in this manner. Benedict's prayers and austerities had always increased, as well as the repugnance that the study of worldly science inspired in his mind, which was charmed only with the things of heaven.

In the year 1766, a contagious disease broke out in Erin, causing great ravages. The parish priest,—a true representative of Christ,—visited the sick, so as to provide them, with the succor of religion, the succor of the warmest charity, and brotherly devotedness. His nephew walked in his footsteps, and was not alarmed by the dangers to which he was exposed, and with which his uncle acquainted him. Not satisfied with caring for the poor patients, he thought of their material interests, and went through meadows and gardens, tending the neglected flocks, and even performing the offices of a herdsman, by carrying heavy loads of fodder on his back.

Owing to the frequent intercourse with the sick, the parish priest was taken ill with the plague, and succumbed after a few days of dreadful sufferings. Although his poor heart was broken, Benedict did not stop in the ministry he had undertaken. According to the word of Christ, *he left the dead to bury the dead;* he relinquished to his family the care of regulating the succession of his uncle, and remained with the sick and dying.

So much devotedness, so much charity, did not astonish the natives of Erin; they were well acquainted with Benedict, and for a long time had called him *the saint.* But they could not avoid regretting that their priest had died, before his nephew was ready to replace him, and they did not fear to say it aloud. Benedict Joseph simply answered them, that he would never dare accept the ministry of souls, and taking

only his dear sermons of P. Aveugle, from the rectory which he had inhabited for four years, he left Erin, and returned to Amette, about All Saints Day in 1766.

Once again in the bosom of his family, Benedict Joseph, far from renouncing the cloister, felt an increasing and more earnest desire to surround himself with silence and solitude.

La Trappe, seemed to him, more than ever, the only object of his life. "God calls me there," said he, "I would fear to damn my soul, if I took charge of the salvation of others."

He abstained from trying again to change his parent's mind, which he knew to be perfectly positive on this subject of his vocation; but he made his conduct speak so plainly, that every one could see, as in a polished mirror, his ever persistent resolution to embrace the life of a cenobite.

He lived, as one dead, to all his surroundings. Nothing excited his covetousness—nothing made him feel concerned. He deprived himself of everything, so that he might not dispose of the least object, nor would he even ask for any. He spoke very little, and only on what related to religion, and might be of some service to souls; but he was constantly assiduous in his prayers, meditation and spiritual reading. At the foot of the altar, the hours passed almost unnoticed; rapt in contemplation, he could not tear himself away from the Church. And when the moment had come to approach the Holy Table, in order to partake of the Bread of Angels, his piety

and recollection, made one dream of heaven. Every one was enraptured on beholding him, and an old man, who died at the age of ninety-three years—some thirty years ago—still remembered the impression made on him in his youth, when assisting at one of these communions during the last weeks of the year 1766.

In accordance with the examples of the monks whom he wished to join, Benedict slept on the floor, and in the morning he was careful to rumple his bed, so as to deceive the vigilance of his mother. But who can deceive the watchful eye of a mother? One night, Anna Barbara Grandsir, surprised her child stretched on the bare floor, his head resting on a piece of knotty wood. "Do not be displeased," said Benedict Joseph, in answer to her reproaches, "since God calls me to La Trappe, should I not commence to practice its austerities, before undertaking them?"

Still, nothing could overcome the opposition of his parents; the virtues of their son, his devotion and all his good qualities, only served to strengthen their resolution. Anxious to devote this choice recruit to the priesthood, convinced that they worked for God and the Church, they confided the education of Benedict, —which had been interrupted for a while by the death of his uncle,—to the oldest of his maternal uncles, James Joseph Vincent, the same, who in former days, had given him his first lesson in reading. He was then in charge of a Vicarial Chapel at Centreville, between Erin and St. Pol.

Benedict Joseph must have blessed Providence for

having conducted him thither, for he found in this worthy priest the same thirst for mortification and penance that he had himself.

The rectory of Centreville was a miserable cottage, open to every wind; it contained no furniture, for it had been distributed to the poor, and the two rooms that composed this modest habitation, were without floor or pavement, and to supply the place of chairs, which had been given in alms, the Abbé Vincent had raised the ground in one place to serve as a bench on which he and his pupil would sit. The food, which was very frugal, and consistent with the general destitution of the place, would have been fit for the table of the severest anchorite.

Father Vincent, according to an anecdote related at Centreville in 1836, prepared his food with his own hands. When his ministerial occupations were over, he attended to his household duties; he gathered the wood given him by his parishioners in easy circumstances, he boiled his soup, and very often when this was cooked, and he was seated at the table with his nephew, ready to partake of the modest repast, they would say to each other: "We are strong, and our health is good, how many others there are near us, in the village, that are ill and infirm? Would not a piece of bread suffice for us? Would we not perform a very charitable work, by taking this food which is superfluous for us, to these poor unhappy people, who need delicate nourishment?" Then uncle and nephew would take the cider, vegetables and soup, and hasten

to distribute them among the most indigent. Having done so, the piece of bread which they had kept for themselves, seemed to have a special flavor, far superior to the most succulent dishes; for charity towards the poor, is a good and charming fairy, that allays every pain, and changes into the sweetest flowers, the sharpest thorns.

Benedict Joseph resumed his classical studies, but, strange to say, he was no longer bored by them as at Erin. It was probably because he felt secure as to his vocation, and his mind being more at rest, he could give closer attention to his books. Be it as it may, he made rapid progress, and according to his master, he excelled in Latin version.

Nevertheless, he always felt in the depths of his soul, something which drew him to a life of complete detachment. Filled with a great dislike for the world, he felt himself invaded by a sublime and undivided feeling of divine love, which is importuned with human intercourse, and craves but one thing, to be buried in solitude with God. He believed he always heard a secret voice that said to him, as the Lord formerly said to Abraham: "*Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.*" And he simply and ingenuously made the avowal to his uncle.

Father Vincent highly approved of his dear nephew's resolution. He had scrupulously studied all his tastes, he understood that such virtue was not made to bloom under the burning rays of this world's

passions; it might eventually wither away. And he concluded that if it were transferred to a mystical garden, well sheltered from the cold cutting blasts of iniquity, it would bear beautiful and abundant fruits. Still, as the austerities and distance of La Trappe alarmed his poor mother, he advised Benedict Joseph to choose another monastery less severe and less distant.

He willingly acquiesced in this proposition; he thought of the Carthusians, who had several houses in the neighborhood. Finally, toward the end of the month of April, 1767, provided with the permission of his parents, he went to the Carthusians of Val Saint Aldegunda, in the diocese of St. Omer. He was then twenty years old, and his trials had lasted four years.

Having reached the monastery, Benedict Joseph now believed he was forever sheltered from the tempest, as the Dove of the Canticles, in the cleft of the rock. But God had many cruel deceptions in store for him before he should be allowed to find the true way.

The convent of Val Saint Aldegunda, which was almost without temporal resources, could not receive postulants. Our blessed Benedict was obliged therefore to seek elsewhere a place of refuge. He knocked at the door of the Carthusians of Neuville, where another disappointment awaited him. Benedict Joseph was not quite twenty years of age, and he was completely ignorant of Dialectics, and Gregorian chant.

Downcast, but not discouraged, Benedict returned to Amette, and, with his parents, considered the means of acquiring the desired knowledge. Naturally, his mind first turned towards the vicar of Centreville, but a sentiment of reserve prevented him from dwelling on the thought, for was not this excellent priest reduced to the most complete poverty, owing to his extreme charity towards the unfortunate poor?

But, at that time,—all we have said up to the present moment goes to prove it,—the means for instruction were not as rare as certain deluded persons of to-day say they were.

Thanks to the Church, each village possessed a school, which stood beside the house of God, a school, teaching respect and good manners; every one, rich and poor, could send his children thither. Undoubtedly, the misapplied word *gratuity*, was not yet known, but effectually, in those days, people knew how to realize it in a wonderful manner. And we greatly doubt, if, with the penalties that are imposed, the propositions that are being daily repeated in a certain press, on the necessity of *gratuitous, obligatory and secular* education, those worthies obtain the grand results which the Church realized during the Middle Ages, and up to Revolution of 1789. They may produce dynamiters, as barbarous as their education has made them, but not real men, and much less, christians.

It was then, easy for our blessed Benedict to find a school outside of Centreville, in order to complete his studies. He placed himself under the direction of

the vicar of Ligny-les-Aire, Joseph Adrien Duffour, who had been one of the pupils of the pastor of Erin.

Benedict Joseph remained about four months at Ligny; during all this time he studied Dialectics, and Gregorian chant, with uncommon ardor. But, alas! he made but middling progress.

According to his professor, the science of the crucifix was better allied with the inclinations of his mind and heart. Notwithstanding, on the sixth of October, 1767, Benedict, with his provision of science, which was very modest, as we have seen, presented himself at the Carthusians of Our Lady of the Meadows at Neuville. This time he did not come alone: he was escorted by one of his comrades that he had won to God by his word and example, and together they came to place themselves under the rule of St. Bruno, and were accepted.

Once in possession of his dear cell, Benedict Joseph suffered inexpressible anguish. Instead of that joy, which he had experienced when he put his feet on the threshold of that holy house, and which he hoped to find under its roof, his soul seemed to be plunged in darkness, and he suffered mental tortures, the cause of which he could not understand. His conscience, devoured by scruples and dreadful fears, was for him a continual torment, and prayers and spiritual readings were ineffectual in giving him peace. Since he considered himself a great sinner, the desire to become a great penitent consumed him; it seemed to him that the labors and sufferings of the Carthusians were too

mild for such a purpose. His aspirations turned towards La Trappe with renewed energy.

The interior troubles of Benedict were soon visible in his exterior deportment; consequently his superiors doubted his vocation. Fearing the exhaustion which this kind of scrupulosity and mental anxiety might produce on such a young mind, they decided to part with him, notwithstanding the rare qualities which they remarked in the pious postulant. "Brother," said the Prior, "we are pleased with you, but our rule is not made for souls like yours; follow the inspiration of God." After a trial of six weeks, Benedict Joseph was obliged to leave the asylum which he had already perfumed with his virtues.

His parents joyfully received him at Amette, as may be easily imagined; they were always persuaded that their son was called by God to the pastoral ministry, and now the course of events seemed to strengthen their belief. And it was a cruel blow, when, the day following his arrival, the holy young man asked to be permitted to start immediately for La Trappe. As before, they endeavored to shake his resolution, but to no avail, it was proof against all attacks. The supplications of maternal love did not soften Benedict Joseph; the authoritative counsels of several venerable priests who desired this ardent soul for the priesthood, did not cause him to hesitate, or to doubt the road he had to take.

He answered, with immovable placidity, that he was not called to the ministry of souls. "Were my father,"

added he, "to lie down across the threshold to prevent me from going, I should feel obliged to step over him, in order to obey the call of God."

His parents had to yield, and history tells us, they did so with a perfect grace and generosity which was truly superhuman.

La Trappe of Mortagne, was one hundred and eighty miles distant from Amette. The intrepid postulant undertook this long and tedious route on foot, over unknown roads, during the dreariest season and continual rain. But the thought that he was finally to reach the port, sustained him, strengthened him, and gave him wings. At last, on November 25th, he rang the monastery bell. Night was casting her dark shadows over the earth, a freezing wind swept before it the last autumn leaves. He made known his wishes, but his desire was repulsed. An inexorable rule prohibited receiving any novice under the age of twenty-four years. In vain did he insist, in vain did he repeat the words addressed to his parents: "It is God's will, he will give me the necessary strength." He was obliged to return to Amette. Sad and disconsolate, he resigned himself without allowing a murmur to escape his lips or enter his heart against Providence.

But how everything has changed! Yesterday, the bad, rough, hard roads, between the Perche woods to the plains of Picardy, seemed to him to be strewn with roses, because he was going toward the land which God had shown him, and because everything was like a cheerful song within him and without.

To-day, those pleasant illusions have all vanished, and his heart is a prey to the most poignant reflections. He must have found the road to his father's house very long,

He finally reached it after a month's absence, emaciated, his feet bleeding, his clothes torn, half naked, and nearly dead, weary, exhausted from fasting, fatigue, and especially from grief.

He was received as the prodigal son of the Gospel. His mother, in particular, was lavish in those attentions, which a mother alone knows how to bestow; she wished to tear from her child's heart, the cenobitical vocation, which he had been pursuing in vain for such a long time, so she gave him a most joyous and tender welcome.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LORD MAKES KNOWN HIS VIEWS ON BENEDICT.

NOTWITHSTANDING all those tribulations, which were of a nature to shake the courage of the bravest-hearted, Benedict Joseph did not doubt his vocation for a single instant. In his soul, there was a perfectly calm and profound conviction as to the will of God; nor could the caresses of his mother, nor the more or less interested counsels of his friends, nor the bitter criticisms of his fellow-citizens, who saw in his perseverance nothing but culpable obstinacy, nor even the remonstrances of Jerome Théret, curate of Amette, which were sometimes friendly, sometimes harsh, change his firm and indomnitable determination to conform himself to it.

One single thought occupied Benedict in the midst of those numerous attacks on his vocation. He asked himself if he had sufficiently importuned the Prior of La Trappe. Perhaps he might have yielded had he been more persistent. And then again, if La Trappe had remained closed to him, should he not have gone to

Sept-Fonts, in the diocese of Autun? These feelings of remorse agitated and tormented his soul. And shortly weary of the struggle, he informed his parents of his intention to return to La Trappe, for he could not believe that his ardent desire to enter the monastery, should keep the doors closed against him if fully considered.

On hearing this proposition, which undoubtedly had been foreseen, but, which was none the less dreaded, the whole family burst into tears, as they always did whenever he spoke of leaving them. His mother, in particular, who was then bearing her fifteenth child, felt herself touched to the heart. She had always had a very tender affection for Benedict, *this son who*, as she herself said later, *never caused her any other pain than that of always wishing to leave the paternal roof, so as go and live in a monastery.* She entreated him with tears in her eyes, to have pity on her sufferings; and by his departure, not to be the cause of sorrow, which, in her present condition, would cause her death; at least to put off the execution of his plans until after her delivery. Benedict, deeply moved, assented to this delay.

In the meantime, Anna Barbara Grandsir, in order to prevent this departure, the thought of which tortured her, begged the intervention of certain persons, who had great influence over her son, and, in particular, that of Father Théret, who was an intimate friend of the family, and a good priest. He was zealous for God's glory, highly educated, and the trusty

friend of the pious Benedict. But, alas! all his efforts were vain. The only thing that the curate of Amette could obtain, was that Benedict Joseph, before undertaking this journey, should write to the Father Prior. He almost knew what the answer would be. And it was in fact the same as had already been given Benedict Joseph at the portals of the monastery. The postulant could not be admitted until he had attained the age irrevocably fixed by the rule.

This new refusal quieted Benedict's anguish of mind, and enkindled new hopes in the heart of his family. In order to bind him more closely to home, his mother asked him to become sponsor with his sister Elizabeth, for the new-born child. After a little hesitation, Benedict finally accepted, and gave to his spiritual son the name of Augustus.

And since he had to wait four years, before being admitted to La Trappe, it was suggested to him that it would be advisable to resume his philosophical studies. He made no objections, and towards the feast of Pentecost, 1768, he returned to his former teacher at Centreville. Notwithstanding his good will, he had very little success. His soul, which was always thirsting for God, could less than ever return to earthly pursuits and conform itself to the aridity of science. And soon after he had returned to Amette, he requested his parents to permit him to share in the agricultural labors of the farm. By so doing, he hoped not to be a burden to them.

Here, he is then, in company with his father and

brothers, digging the ground, and reaping the harvest. He objects to nothing. But the pre-occupation of his mind rendered him as unfit for manual labor as for philosophical abstractions. One day, his father ordered him to go and shake some wheat that needed to be dried, before it could be gathered in, Benedict hastened to obey. Suddenly the rain began to fall in torrents, but he hardly noticed it, and continued to work until he had finished his task ; then he returned to the house, the rain streaming from his garments, but his heart was gay for he had finished the work. His father upbraided him first, on account of his health which might suffer from such exposure, and then for his work, so unluckily achieved. "My father," answered Benedict, "you had ordered me to do so." Some of our readers will undoubtedly say, and with reason : "What a poor farmer!" In our turn, we will say : "What a beautiful soul!" since, according to the example of Jesus Christ, he knew how to obey.

Meanwhile, the voice that was calling Benedict to tread the rough paths of penance, was still speaking loudly in the depth of his soul. This poor young man dreaded to be unfaithful to it by allowing himself to be hindered by the obstacles which seemed as though they sprung up in all his footsteps. He resolved to confide his anxieties to one of his relatives, Michael Joseph Flamand, then canon of the cathedral of Bologne. He was received with great kindness by this worthy man who did not dare solve the difficulties, but advised

his holy cousin to consult the bishop himself, expose to him the state of affairs, and await his decision. The prelate took sufficient time to listen, question and ask for minute details, and, finally, being convinced that God wished Benedict to be separated from the world and had wonderful designs upon him, said: "Go my son, God wants you to be a monk, return among the Carthusians." This was, as we will remember, his first halting place, on this long and laborious route, which he was following for such a long time, in search of his vocation.

Benedict did not hesitate a single moment to obey his command, which to him, seemed to come direct from heaven. For the second time, he ventured to knock at the door of the Carthusians of Neuville, and thanks to the protection of the Bishop of Pressy, he was permitted to enter. Feeling certain that he had at last found his true home, he reurned to Amette so as to take leave of his relatives and friends. His resolution was irrevocable; whatever the result of his proceedings might be, he decided never in this world to go back to his family. He then informed his father and mother that he should never return, "and that he would see them again only in the valley of Josaphat." Heart-broken with grief, yet, happy that their son was to dwell in the vicinity, these venerable parents placed their hands on their beloved son's head, and blessed him in the name of the Most High.

On August 12th, 1769, Benedict, then in his twenty-second year, left his father's home, and took posses-

sion of his new cell. But no sooner had he entered it, than he became a prey to the same torments which he had endured two years before. He suffered the same anguish, the same uneasiness, the same aridity but, he possessed also the same piety, the same submission, the same regularity. At the end of six weeks, the Reverned Father Prior dismissed him, saying, "Providence does not call you to our life—follow the inspirations of Divine Grace."

Benedict's heart turned immediately towards La Trappe, and from Montreuil, he sent a letter to his parents, in which he renewed his adieus, and which remains to us as a testimony of his character and of his virtue. He writes as follows:

My dear father, and very dear mother:—

"I must tell you that the Carthusians do not think me called to follow their rule, and therefore I left them on the second day of October. I look upon this as the will of God, for I think I am called to a more perfect state of life. They themselves informed me it was the hand of God that would direct me elsewhere. Therefore, I have set out for La Trappe, the place I desire so much, and for which I have sighed so long.

"I beg your pardon for all my past faults, and for all the sorrows I have caused you. I pray you both to give me your blessing, so that God may accompany me everywhere. I will offer my petitions to God for you every day of my life. Above all, do not be anxious

about me; even if I had desired to remain in this convent, they would not have kept me, that is why I I greatly rejoice, for the Almighty is now directing me.

"Be careful in the education of my brothers and sisters, especially my godson. With the help of God, I will never again be an expense to you, and will cause you no more sorrow. I request the help of your prayers. I am well, and I have not given any money to the servant.* I received the Sacraments before leaving the monastery. Let us always serve God, and He will never abandon us. Work out your salvation. Read and practice what Father L'Aveugle teaches; it is a book that shows the way to heaven; and, unless we do as it says, we cannot hope for salvation. Meditate on the frightful pains of hell, which last for an eternity, to punish one mortal sin so easily committed. Endeavor to be among the small number of the elect.

"I thank you for all your kindness to me, and for the services you have rendered me. God will reward you. Give my brothers and sisters the same education you have given me; it is the means of making them happy in heaven; without religious instruction we cannot save our souls. I believe that you are much better without me. I have cost you a great deal, but be assured that with God's grace, I will profit by all you have done for me. Do not grieve because I have left the Carthusians; we are not permitted to

*The servant who was to carry his letter to Amette.

resist God's will. He has provided everything for my good and for my salvation.

"I beg you to present my compliments to my brothers and sisters. Give me your blessing. I will pain you no more. God, whom I received before leaving the monastery, will assist and conduct me in carrying out what He Himself has inspired. I will always have the fear of God before my eyes, and His love in my heart. I firmly hope to be received at the Trappists.

"At all events, I am told, that the order of Sept-Fonts not being so severe, they receive younger postulants; but in any case I will be admitted by the Trappists.

"MONTREUIL, Oct. 2d, 1769."

From Montreuil, Benedict Joseph wended his way once more to Perche; he had before him—and he was aware of it—a long and painful route; he had no provisions in his traveling bag, and not the smallest piece of money in his purse. But nothing daunted him for he relied on the God who feeds the little birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field. He started as buoyantly as others do, when in pursuit of pleasure and riches. Never did exile return to country, home and friends, after years of absence, with a lighter heart or brisker step.

He reached his destination exhausted, emaciated and bowed down with fatigue and privation. But, as before, he found the rule inflexible, the superiors inexorable. In vain did he entreat, shed tears, give way to lamenta-

tions and importunities, as he formerly reproached himself for not having done. It was in vain! His entreaites and tears, could not open the portals of the monastery.

Benedict offered this new trial to God, and in spite of everything, relying on Divine Providence, he took the route for Sept-Fonts, near Moulins, in the diocese of Autun. It was about three hundred miles distant, but his courage was in nowise daunted. The Lord sustained his child in a visible manner, and guided him by the hand toward the career He wished him to follow.

Benedict reached Sept-Fonts on the thirtieth day of October, 1769. He was admitted. Three days after, Father Dorothy Jalluoto presented him to the chapter, so that he might solicit his admission as choir novice, and on the eleventh day of November, Benedict Joseph laid aside his secular garments and the name he had always borne, to assume that of a novice, and the name of Brother Urban.

The young novice seemed at once a consummate religious. Joyously submissive to the rigor of the cistercian rule, he cheerfully followed all the regulations of the convent. He even surpassed all the other religious in regularity; and his extreme modesty, his excellent disposition, the charm of his language, won for him the esteem of his superiors, and the affection of his brothers. "On contemplating him," said one of them, Justin Richard, later a professed religious, "we could not help considering him blessed."

Benedict Joseph's soul expanded, and took delight

in this austere and crucifying life. Entire days consecrated, under the yoke of obedience, to prayers, meditation, penance, and the hardest work, passed with the rapidity of lightning.

But, this was not yet the haven of rest for Benedict, it was only another halting-place, a short station, before entering the land of promise which God had shown him, and which was always fleeing before his eyes. The Lord clearly pointed it out to him.

Benedict Joseph had been at Sept-Fonts only a few months, when those same interior tribulations, which he had already experienced twice, assailed him with unheard of violence. He saw nothing but faults in all his actions; his timorous conscience represented him as a great criminal—more guilty than Judas. He did not dare approach the Holy Table, because he had read in the life of certain holy penitents, that they had been favored by exterior signs of contrition; they had wept, moaned and sobbed. As he saw himself deprived of all these graces, he attributed it to the hardness of his heart, and consequently to the absence of contrition. It is true, all these tortures vanished before the wise counsels and charitable remonstrances of his teachers; but they soon after returned more numerous and more violent than before; his condition was in some measure comparable to that of the damned in hell.

His health was beginning to fail; toward the end of April, 1770, he fell sick, a fever obliged him to go to the infirmary. The physicians held a consultation, and said that his constitution appeared to them too

weak, to endure the severity of the rule. The Father Abbot was already anxious, he feared that the extreme delicacy of Benedict's conscience, would interfere with the regularity of his house, and he resolved to part, though reluctantly, with this fervent novice. He sent him word that they would take him to the exterior hospital established for the poor. On hearing this, Benedict Joseph joined his hands with the fervor of an angel, and raising his eyes to heaven, said, "Fiat voluntas tua!" "Lord, thy will be done!"

Benedict entered the hospital of Sept-Fonts on May 15th, 1770, and remained there until July 2d. During those six weeks, the Lord made known to him in the clearest manner His designs as to his future course. Father Temple, of whom we will speak later, is precise on this point. "In order to know the will of God," said he at the Apostolical Trial, "and what state of life he should choose, Benedict Joseph redoubled his fervent prayers, and he felt in his heart an inspiration that deeply touched him, which was of walking in the footsteps of Saint Alexius, leaving his country, his parents, and all the comforts of home, and going to Italy." Still, notwithstanding this voice which seemed to speak to him so clearly, a most sensitive inspiration that moved his heart strongly, Benedict did not wish to follow it without having first consulted a pious director. Who was this pious director, history does not tell us. But what it does precisely state, is that this director who was a French priest, as prudent as he was enlightened, approved everything in Benedict's new resolve.

Henceforth sure of his vocation, Benedict Joseph firmly broke the last link that bound him to mankind, and carried away by the burning love of God with which he was inflamed, he resolved to have no other shelter than the vault of heaven, no other bed than the vestibules of the churches, or the bare ground; no other bread than that of charity, no other friends than the poor. He left Sept-Fonts, and started for Italy, according to the inspiration received from heaven. He intended to go to Rome, but before having reached Loreto, his feeble health, weakened by sickness, privation, exposure, and a long journey on foot, obliged him to pass three weeks in one of the hospitals of Piedmont.

As soon as he left the hospital, he hastened to write to his parents, to acquaint them with his new way of living. Still in this letter, he does not dare to fully open his heart to them; he seems to fear giving them too much pain, and with a son's solicitude, he speaks to them of his intention of one day entering a monastery, which desire he hopes to see realized; it seemed as though he wished to offer them some consolation. But his resolution to obey God's will, was very firm, no matter how severe it might appear in the eyes of the world. And that is why he was so persistent in asking their blessing—the last one he was to receive from his parents.

Allow us to reproduce here, the entire letter, and the last one written by Benedict. It is consoling to recall, when they are completed, the noble actions of

a forefather, and to read more than once the last page that issued from his heart as well as from his pen!

"*My dear father, and my very dear mother :—*

"You have learned that I have left the Abbey of Sept-Fonts, and you are, no doubt, at a loss to know which directions I have since then taken, and what state of life I wish to choose. It is in order to do my duty, and relieve you of all anxiety that I write this letter. To begin with, I will tell you that I left Sept-Fonts on July 2d. I was yet sick and feverish when I departed from the monastery; this fever disappeared only on the fourth day of my trip. I started for Rome, and now, I am about half way there. I have not made much progress since I left Sept-Fonts, because the month of August is exceedingly warm in Piedmont where I am, and also because I was confined to a hospital three weeks (where I was quite comfortable) on account of a slight illness. I have been well the rest of the time since my departure.

"In Italy, there are several monasteries where they lead a very regular and austere life. With God's help, I intend to enter one of these. I even know a monastery of the Trappist order, the superior of which has written to an abbot in France, saying that if any French novices asked for admission, he would receive them with pleasure, for he needed subjects. I have good certificates from the Abbey of Sept-Fonts. Do not be anxious about me, I will not fail to send you news. I would like to receive some from you and

from my brothers and sisters, but it is not possible at present, as I am not in any fixed place.

"I never fail to pray to God for you daily. I beg your pardon for all the pain I may have given, and I crave your blessing, so that the benedictions of God may direct my intentions. It is to accomplish God's will, that I undertake this journey.

"Above all things take care of your salvation, and the education of my brothers and sisters. Watch over their conduct. Think of the eternal flames of hell, and the small number of the elect. I am glad I have undertaken this trip. I beg you to give my compliments to grandmother and grandfather, to my aunts, to my brother James, to all my brothers and sisters, and to my uncle *Chois*, (Francis). I am about to enter a country that is delightful to travellers. I was obliged to prepay my letter, so that it might leave the States of the King of Sardinia until it reached France.

"I close by asking you to grant me your blessing, and your pardon for all the sorrows I have given you.

"Written in the city of Quiers, in Piedmont, the 31st day of August, 1770.

"Your very affectionate son,

"BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE."

From this moment, when the last link of the chain was severed, which confined him to country and parents, a sweet peace filled this servant of God; he tasted that quiet joy, that solemn repose of the soul that has at last found its vocation.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE OF PERPETUAL PILGRIMAGES.

IT was evidently God's will that Benedict should not be confined in a cloister, but that he should be placed before the eyes of the people, as an object of edification, a living example of the divine Crucified One, always absorbed in prayer and meditation.

Benedict set out alone, unknown, without recommendation, without means, with no other protection than that of divine Providence, and for a companion the invisible angel who accompanied him everywhere. With a staff in his hand, he traveled over mountains and through valleys, always choosing the most solitary and difficult paths. The ragged garment in which he was clothed, did not in the least resemble a religious habit, and it would be very hard to define its shape; it was, says one of his biographers, a sort of a dark gray garment, covered with a cloak, which was very short, and a cord, to which was attached a wooden bowl, girdled his loins; a brass crucifix hung upon his breast; a chaplet, with large beads, hung from his

neck; and over his shoulders was thrown a satchel which contained his dearest earthly treasures: a few pious books, the New Testament, and the four volumes of the breviary.

Thus equipped, Benedict took the paths which led to the venerated shrines, that had witnessed the examples and miracles of the saints. Neither the rainy season, nor the bad roads impeded his progress. He begged for his bread in the streets, at the doors of stores, and at convent gates. Henceforth he had no other home than the churches, no other bed than the public squares or neglected monuments.

Benedict went first to Loreto. He longed to see the greatest shrine on earth, since it contained within its walls, the house in which had dwelt Joseph, Mary, and the Redeemer of mankind; besides he was desirous to place his life of perpetual pilgrimages under the protection of the Queen of Heaven.

Thence, he went to Assisi, so as to strengthen his love of poverty, by meditating before the tomb of the holy Patriarch of Umbria. After leaving there, he wended his way to Rome, where he sojourned for a few weeks, and which was to be later his home, when his health would no longer permit him to continue his peregrinations. Henceforth the traces of the pilgrimages are partly lost. However, people have kept the remembrance of the travels of the holy mendicant, and tradition has handed down the account of his visits to the illustrious shrines of Spain, France, Italy and Germany. He was certainly seen at St. James, in

Galicia, at Our Lady of Einsiedeln, perhaps at the calvary of Mount Valerian, near Parina, and at Our Lady of Liesse; also at the tomb of St. Francis Regis, in Vivarais; at our Lady of Fourviere; at Paray-le-Monial; at Besançon—where he went to venerate the Holy Shroud.

On reaching these places, he was worn out with fatigue, weakened and emaciated from fasting. He passed through cities without noticing or looking at the marvels of art which embellished them. He went straight to the sanctuary that attracted him, and there kneeling on the flagstones, hidden in the angle of a chapel or behind a pillar, he remained long hours, lost, so to speak, in divine contemplation.

Who can explain the impression produced in the heart of the people by this stranger, so meanly clothed, whose name was unknown, and whom they never again beheld?

In accordance with the example of Our Divine Savior, Benedict Joseph, who seemed to pass in the midst of men without seeing them, was for them, nevertheless, a special Providence; he went among them doing good, dispensing blessings to all in his way; at one time he consoled the afflicted; at another he gave good advice; here he attended the sick, there he guided tottering steps; again, he obtained certain favors from heaven to reward a benevolent action towards himself, and sometimes, which is something astonishing, this poor man, this beggar, divided what was given him in alms, keeping but the strict neces-

saries for himself, and relieved the wants of those more indigent, or more exacting than himself. Everywhere he went, he left an impression of extraordinary virtue.

On beholding such excessive immolation of one's self, on beholding so much charity and so much devotion, men respectfully bowed down their heads, for in Benedict they saw Jesus Christ's beggar, as they called him. They knew him by no other name, and they endeavored to edify one another by the example of his life. God alone knows the number of souls that were converted, or who progressed in virtue at the sight alone of this messenger of His graces.

But we would be wrong in thinking that Benedict Joseph's charity and piety, his way of living, which was holy but eccentric, never excited aught but respect and admiration. At that time, as well as to-day, there were false professors of liberty, who, in the name of liberty, committed all sorts of base and vile actions, and, who in the name of liberty, refused to others the right to pray, to ask for alms, and to go about clothed in ragged garments.

It is related that when blessed Benedict was at Bari, in the fall of 1771, a young libertine named Michael, famous in the vicinity for his audacity and wickedness, tried to turn him into ridicule. Being unable to move him by his insults and jokes, he resolved to be avenged. One day at noon, when Benedict was leaving the church, Michael rang a little bell so as to call his attention, then, by gesticulations and

wry faces, tried to imitate in a ridiculous manner the devout demeanor of the pilgrim; at the same time, he picked up a sharp stone which he held ready, then threw it with all his strength and struck Benedict on the ankle; the blow was strong enough to cause the blood to gush from his foot. Benedict Joseph tottered and without looking to see whence came this undeserved attack, he tightly clasped his crucifix to his breast, and pressed it to his lips, then picking up the stone, he kissed it, laid it against the nearest wall and meekly continued on his way.

A cry of indignation arose from all parts of the street, against the coward who stole away so as to escape the punishment he so well deserved. But he could not avoid divine justice; the day came, when he saw himself assailed by the same weapons he had used against his victim; he became an object of universal contempt. The children jeered at him, and, one day, a stone struck his ankle, the blood sprung from the wound, and the miserable young man tottered and fell; his fall was the signal for new insults. The wound became inflamed, festered and finally gangrene set in. One morning a corpse was found in a stable; . . . . . it was the dead body of Michael of the *wicked race*, for such was the name given him.

In his pilgrimages throughout Europe, Benedict Joseph sometimes met with towns, in Switzerland and Germany which were infested by heresies. From all accounts, these places were extremely repugnant to him, and in order to avoid them, he would take the

longest and oftentimes the most difficult by-paths, and when occasionally he was obliged to take the regular route, he went over it as speedily as possible, traveling day and night, without taking a single instant to rest, without excepting a penny or a piece of bread, and without addressing a word to any one. This is a grand lesson to many christians of our day who always have at their tongue's end high sounding words of conciliation and universal toleration, and who do not know that horror of heresy is the most beautiful proof they can give of their love of truth.

Rome was the centre of Benedict's travels; he always returned there after his peregrinations round the world; it seemed to him, and with reason, that in this city, above all others, he was at home. And in fact was it not the capital of the Christian world, the city of his Fathers, the city of the Pope? Alas! why is it not so now? . . . . But God carefully guards His Church, and she will soon triumph over all her enemies.

We will not try to follow Benedict in his various trips through France, Germany and Switzerland; narratives are not wanting and they abound in wonderful facts, but perhaps they are not sufficiently authentic. The different documents commenced to be affirmed only towards the year 1774, which is the date Benedict Joseph returned to Rome for the third time.

CHAPTER VI.

SOJOURN IN ROME.

BENEDICT had no home during the first years of his stay in Rome. He passed his days in adoration in the numerous basilicas of the Eternal City, and he preferred the least frequented and most deserted sanctuaries.

At night he slept under an arcade of the Coliseum, or on the steps of a church. For a long time his chosen place of rest was under a low vault which supported the exterior stair-case of a house in Monte Cavallo place; it was surely a more suitable shelter for an animal than for a human being.

"During the winter of 1770," relates Father Charles Carezani, "as I was passing at a very early hour through that quarter, I noticed a moving object in this dark recess. As the day had scarcely dawned, I first thought I saw a large dog. My curiosity being aroused, I drew near and distinguished a young man to whom this hole served as a shelter, and who, at that very moment, was preparing to leave it; the opening was

so low that in order to do so, he was obliged to bend himself almost to the ground.

"He was dressed miserably, but his physiognomy belied his costume, for it expressed modesty and politeness, quite uncommon among that class. His face bespoke humility, and the peace of a well disciplined soul; and he seemed to be no more than twenty years of age. His complexion was pale, and a reddish beard was beginning to grow on his chin. The sight of so much misery awakened in me sentiments of pity for the unfortunate young man. I continued to watch him for a few moments, and I could not avoid concluding that one must be very degraded to live in such a place. But I quickly rejected this bad opinion, when I saw him, as he left his retreat, raise his eyes to heaven, respectfully make the sign of the cross, then pass some time in prayer and meditation. I supposed he was some good servant of God, and for meeting him there and then I was grateful to the Almighty."

Benedict Joseph went through the streets of Rome with down-cast eyes and a peaceful face. The modesty of his gait was relieved by an air of majesty and nobility. The purity of his heart beamed in his eye and was apparent in his whole person. The holiness of his soul was visible through the ragged garments which covered him and evidenced the gravity of his manner and deportment. Accustomed as he was to prayer and contemplation, his soul seemed to have received the impress of the Divinity, and this impres-

sion gave to his face an air of heavenly goodness, which when attentively observed, could never be forgotten. His forehead seemed surrounded by a real halo of light, which caused a deep and startling impression. "See this poor man," cried a woman, "see how beautiful he is! How good! Oh! he surely resembles Jesus! *Quanto é mai bello, quanto é mai buono quel poverello, pare proprio un Salvatore!*" Undoubtedly Benedict Joseph did not realize the ideal that man generally forms of the beautiful, and much less of the type attributed to our Savior; his head was large, his forehead prominent, high and full, his nose flat and large, his face broad; but interior light transformed his features, and on seeing him so humble, so modest, so retired, one instinctively thought of Mary's Son.

But the veneration excited by his presence was not what Benedict Joseph desired. He longed to be humiliated and despised. His thoughts invariably turned towards the Passion of our Lord; every meditation, every effusion of his soul, every prayer naturally inclined him to it. The ignominies of the Praetorium, the sufferings of Calvary were ever present to his mind and his highest ambition was to resemble his crucified Lord, and to reproduce in himself the image of Jesus, despised and insulted. He desired to be loathed by men, and he ever excited the contempt of many by his proverty, his abjection, and sometimes by the extravagance of his costume, and when in the streets crowds of children hooted him, and called him a thief and a fool, threw mud and filth at him, he slack-

ened his pace and even stood still, so as to taste these humiliations to the utmost. One day, passing through Trajan's place, Benedict Joseph was hemmed in by a band of eight or ten wicked men, who actually made a plaything of him ; they mocked him with all sorts of contortions, they struck him, they pulled his beard and hair, they spat upon him and slapped his face. Benedict was as patient as the lamb that is being shorn of its wool. Knocked about from one to the other, the servant of God finally stumbled. Then they all fell upon him with fearful cries ; they stamped on him and spat in his eyes and mouth. These wicked deeds did not alarm the victim, who, fortified by his forbearance, received this shower of blows and outrages with the greatest unconcern ; not a single movement betrayed the least effort to defend or save himself. Mary Catherine Donati, a noble Venetian lady, witnessed this spectacle, which reminded her of Jesus Christ in the midst of his executioners. She became indignant, and bravely advancing addressed the cowards. "Ferocious men," cried she, "do you wish to kill him, as the Jews killed our Lord?" This rebuke, and the presence of a few passers-by who began to gather, put an end to the cruel sport of the malefactors, who dispersed saying, "he is a fool, we may as well make fun of him." Mary Catherine Donati answered, "it is you who are fools—he is a saint." Ten years later she wept with admiration, at the simple thought of this scene.

This ill usage did not quench in Benedict Joseph

the thirst for humiliations which devoured him. Moreover his condition, his ragged clothes, his way of living, naturally exposed him, so to speak, to all sorts of insults and humiliations. He wore a wretched hat, and worn out shoes; his lower limbs were bare, and whenever he received the gift of stockings, instead of wearing them, he fastened them to his belt, so that those who formed a good opinion of him could not avoid saying in their turn; "he is a fool." Benedict not only shunned the esteem of men but he craved for everything resembling mortification. "He converted every natural inclination," said one of his passionate admirers with energetic accuracy, "into so many sufferings for his body." In fact, nothing can compare with the mortifications which this innocent soul inflicted upon himself, he who had perhaps never willingly committed a sin, and who returned his soul to God clothed in its baptismal robe.

Benedict cared little for the inclemency of the weather. Drenched with rain and covered with mire, his feet damp, chilled, and purple with cold, he remained hours and entire days in meditation. And notwithstanding all these discomforts, he was perfectly calm and cheerful; so testified Father Reder, in the preliminary investigations. "I saw him several times," said he, "brave storms in mid-winter, when the rain would run down his collar and trickle down his skin. He never dreamed of changing his garments, but let them dry on his body, without curtailing his meditations."

One Friday, during the winter, Benedict was leaving the Church of St. Cyr, after benediction at the close of the day; it was pouring rain and very cold. Having reached a corner of the street Benedict was obliged to stop in order to allow a wagon to pass that blocked the way; he happened to stand directly under a rain-spout from which fell a torrent of water. Several persons and among others the mistress of a neighboring house, invited him to seek shelter in a shop close by; he thanked them gracefully, with a sign of the head, but waited under the stream of water until the road was free, then he went on his way, thanking God for having afforded him an occasion to suffer something for His sake. When Benedict rested at night, he never laid aside the miserable rags that served him as a raiment; even on his death-bed he would not consent to part with this livery which he prized above all earthly goods. In the cold and rainy season, it was in this attire, soaked through with water, that he slept a painful sleep.

Benedict Joseph voluntarily gave himself up to another enemy which made his rest by night and by day more unbearable.

Numberless insects, whose name alone inspires horror, swarmed in his hair and beard, and crawled all over his body.

A very authentic detail recorded at the Process, describes the respect the blessed beggar had for these precious tormentors of his body.

The saint's cruelty to his person seems incredible

to our understanding. We would willingly pronounce him demented and foolish, if, through all this misery and self-inflicted pain, our eye, illumined by a ray of faith, did not see the happiness and triumph of true virtue. Benedict never tired of the adoration and contemplation of God made man; he passed his life at the foot of the tabernacle, and still his love was never satisfied.

Of all the churches in Rome, he preferred those in the neighborhood of the Coliseum; it was the section where resided the poor, the district where Benedict Joseph usually spent his nights. He had a special preference for the church of Santa Maria dei Monti, he might be seen waiting on his knees until the doors were opened. He always remained on the Epistle side of the altar, at a corner of the communion railing, his hands joined on his breast, kneeling on both knees, his eyes half closed, his eyelids immovable, communing with God as a friend with his friend, his breviary and his other pious books close by. After having finished his meditation, he would take the book containing the holy office, and read the words with angelic piety, and after each psalm or each lesson, he would lay down his book and meditate on the thoughts and affections suggested by the words he had just read. The forenoon passed thus in prayer and meditation, he seemed unconscious of the flight of time.

When, towards noon, according to the custom in Rome, the church doors were closed, Benedict would leave his post, and if it were not a fast day he would

go to a neighboring convent gate where they distributed soup. It often happened, that, as he came last, the provisions were exhausted when he presented his cup; in such cases he satisfied his hunger by fragments of food, more or less spoiled and disgusting, that he found in the streets; the smallest crust, the most unsavory parings, he considered good enough for himself; on fast days this strange meal was put off until night, and when he had partaken of his humble supper, while waiting for the opening of the church, he would visit shrines of the Madonna, or some venerable place, such as the Coliseum and the Scala Santa.

At Rome, during the summer, the heat is unbearable. In the middle of the day, the streets are quite deserted, no one can be seen except an occasional stranger, who is anxious to visit the monuments of the Eternal City, and who fears to lose one of the precious moments granted him by the driver of the heavy carriage that awaits him. The Romans seek the cool shelter of their rooms, where, hidden away from the burning rays of the sun, and quietly resting, they peacefully await the cool evening breeze. Benedict Joseph who was indifferent to shade and shelter, remained exposed to the hot sun, often bare-headed, and sometimes leaning against a wall bathed in sunlight,—he wished that all nature, the sun as well as the rain, the heat as well as the cold, should help him to satisfy his thirst for mortification.

Then he would go to the church doors to wait until

they should be opened, and on the way he never discontinued his prayers. From a certain movement of the lips, it was plain to see that he conversed with God; in fact he continually recited the *Miserere*, or some other psalm and prayers, fulfilling to the letter, the divine precept to pray always and never to cease. In the morning, when he knelt, he always turned his face toward the church.

Benedict liked to attend those sanctuaries in which some special devotion was being observed, especially the forty hours.

The church of St. Praxedes, in which is preserved the Holy Pillar; the church of St. Ignatus in which take place every Friday the exercises for a good death, the *ava coeli*, and the Basilica of the Twelve Apostles, attracted him. After Santa Maria dei Monti, which always remained his favorite church, he preferred St. Maria Sopra Minervani. The solitude of this sanctuary permitted him to abandon himself more freely to the ecstacies of his piety. Benedict on entering the church, would approach the altar of the Blessed Sacrament, and there remain whole hours wrapt in contemplation. "I examined him one day," relates Gaston Reder, "when he was prostrated on the pavement of St. Martina's Church. I could not draw my eyes away from this poor man, whose countenance made me think that I beheld one of those heavenly spirits, who are ever before the Almighty. I left the church, and four or five hours later, returned and found him in the same position. The guard told me that he had

not changed it for a single instant." "Oh!" said I, "were this man a priest, he alone would suffice to adore before the Blessed Sacrament."

And, Gaston Reder, in his testimony at the Apostolic process, added, after examining and comparing himself with this fervent worshiper, "what a shame for so many christians, and especially for us priests, who find it so hard to pass an hour before the King of Kings! And when we do, we must have a pew, cushions and other commodities, while this poor beggar, badly fed, badly clothed, exhausted by mortification, remains there several hours in succession, kneeling on the pavement, without any support, and without even changing his attitude."

Benedict often sighed and moaned, through very love for Jesus, especially when he was before the most Holy Eucharist. He would extend his arms in the form of a cross, turn his face toward the tabernacle, and seem to be in ecstacy; he seemed to be lost in love, and no longer master of his senses.

The hours grew into night which came and found Benedict still kneeling at the foot of the altar. The guard shook his keys intimating that it was time to leave. But he could scarcely tear himself away from the house of his God. Sometimes he obtained permission to pass the night before the Blessed Sacrament, especially in those churches in which the forty hours devotion were taking place. And when the churches were finally closed, there remained the church doors, the Coliseum, and all the secluded places, that, according

to circumstances, afforded him an asylum, where, trying to overcome sleep, he prolonged his devotions.

This perpetual kneeling on the pavements of the churches, caused an excrescence, the size of an egg, to grow on his knees; all the weight of his body fell upon these tumors, which caused the saint cruel pain. Still he continued praying always on his knees, and for hours at a time he remained immovable in spite of this ceaseless torture, and the insects, which covered him as with a living hair shirt.

Such a way of living terrifies the imagination. Benedict was only the shadow, and had only the appearance of the human form; still he spoke of "curbing youth, which" he said "is bad." He was so emaciated, so colorless, his hair and beard so unkempt, his garments so ragged, and his whole person so neglected, that he reminded one of the stoics of the last days of the Empire, who preached mortifications and walked the streets of Rome, proud of their rags and unkempt beard. But Faith, guiding us to Benedict's soul, reveals to us there a grandeur of which the stoics did not even possess an idea. No, the holy beggar's greatness does not consist merely in his superhuman austerity; the corporal punishments were but a screen that conceal the beauty and graces hidden in his soul. Its splendor consisted in that purity which no pestiferous breath had tarnished, nor a wicked thought or desire had polluted, and which never gave the slightest consent to the importunities of voluptuousness.

Benedict's beauty consisted chiefly in that love of Jesus Christ which consumed him. One day in the church Santa Maria dei Monti a ray of this beauty darted through his ragged garment and the insects that were crawling over him. He was noticed by a pious young lady, Mary Poeti, who knew not how to express her admiration at what she beheld. "I saw," relates she, "an extraordinary light illuminate his face, it was all the more astonishing as I could scarcely distinguish the other assistants in the darkness. For nearly half an hour I watched him attentively. I always saw the light that surrounded his body. He held his head high, his neck stretched, his eyes fixed on heaven, as though in contemplation. He seemed to be a palm or more higher than the railing. For an instant I turned my eyes away from this vision, and when I looked again, all had disappeared." Benedict, with his head bowed on his breast, had resumed his accustomed position.

CHAPTER VII.

PILGRIMAGES TO LORETO.

VERY year, about Eastertide, Benedict Joseph would leave Rome and wend his way towards Loreto, which was his favorite place of pilgrimage, ever since he had devoted his wandering life to visiting the various shrines of Europe and fixed his residence in Rome.

A journey from Rome to Loreto, was, at that time, a great and difficult undertaking; for travelers had to ford torrents and be satisfied with the fare of the most miserable inns. They had to cross the Appenine mountains, which, in mid-winter, were entirely covered with snow, and in certain places, they had to find their way through the narrowest passes, some of which were of the greatest height. Benedict's resolution never to follow frequented roads, added new obstacles to the already arduous journey, for he had to climb mountains and hills, walk over loose stones, or on the sharp edges of rocks, take long roundabout paths, and force his way through deep ravines filled with tangled brushwood. His poor garments, caught

by the brambles growing along the roadside, were torn to shreds; and his shoes, worn by travel, were not much protection to his bruised and bleeding feet.

Benedict walked, and walked always without the least consideration for his body, musing on the delightful thought that he would soon behold the house where Mary conceived the Eternal Word, and where, with loving care, she watched over the Divine Infant Jesus.

And when, after days of sufferings and fatigue, the Basilica of Loreto appeared to him on the top of the hill which it so gracefully crowned, his heart expanded, his eye brightened with new delight, and his forehead shone with glory.

Following the example of the pious pilgrims of Palestine, who, from as far as they could see the holy city, uncovered their heads and removed their shoes, then prostrated themselves on that ground which had been honored and sanctified by so many miracles; he also, from as far as he could perceive the Basilica of Loreto, fell on his knees, and kissed the ground, rendered sacred by the contact of the house which Mary had inhabited, and in which had taken place the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Word.

Then, arising, joyous and alert, he went to pay his homage to "his good mother," and passed long hours, often entire days under the shadow of the Santa Casa, or before the Blessed Sacrament, kneeling immovably in the most sublime meditation and con-

stant adoration. He did not care where his lodging was to be, nor what he was to eat. His only thought was to satisfy his devotion towards the Blessed Virgin; he knew that Providence, who, with maternal interest, watches over the smallest of birds, would provide for his body. Had he not always been the spoiled child of Providence? And, moreover, the bare and cold threshold of the Basilica, was it not a thousand times better in his eyes than palaces and their luxurious beds, since he was beside those he loved most in the world—Jesus and Mary? The remnants of eatables that he found on the corners of the street, he considered good enough nourishment for his body—his poor and miserable body that would soon serve as food for the worms of the earth.

Benedict Joseph passed whole days in church, from day-break until sun-down, he would not even go (as he used to do in Rome) to the neighboring convent where soup was given out at noon. It was undoubtedly owing to the fact that the Basilica remained opened until night-fall, that Benedict Joseph was detained there by his piety, not wishing to lose even one of those precious moments. Finally, when he was obliged to leave the church, he sought shelter under the porches.

One day, as the sexton of the church was returning to his house, about two and a half hours after sunset, he crossed the piazza that ran along the side of the Penitenziaria on which was placed a miraculous statue of the Blessed Virgin. As it was dark, his feet struck

a form that seemed to be lying on the ground under that image. He stumbled, and astonished that the form made no motion, he said to himself, "it is an intoxicated man, sleeping off the effect of his wine." The next morning at day-break, before unlocking the doors of the church, he went to see if the drunken man was in the same position. But, instead of find- a person under the influence of wine, he saw a pilgrim bowed down to the earth, and in ecstacy before the holy image; it was our dear Benedict, to whom, undoubtedly, the Blessed Virgin Mary had appeared in all the splendor of her divine beauty.

We can readily understand that so much piety and self-sacrifice, attracted the attention of the pilgrims of Loreto towards Benedict Joseph. They were amazed at his absorbed attention before the altar, as well as at his mean and miserable outfit. But, what excited in the highest degree the wonder of the people, was that a poorly clad beggar like Benedict should recite the holy office and consequently have a knowledge of Latin. "It is probably some Jesuit in disguise," said they. And one day, Angelo Verdelli, one of the priests of the Basilica, approached Benedict while he was praying with a breviary in his hands near the altar of the Annunciation, and, being unable to conceal his astonishment, said to him, "You read the Hours?" "Yes;" curtly replied Benedict, and in a tone that manifested his displeasure at being disturbed by such an exclamation in church, and also, for being thus interrupted in the

midst of his prayers: *con voce di dispiacere per la sorpresa.*

Benedict was a subject of admiration for all the pilgrims of Loreto; they called him "Little St. Francis," and every one requested his prayers. But this admiration was mingled with pity, for it was impossible to look upon so much misery without feeling the desire to alleviate it.

"With your education," said Father Valeri to Benedict, "why do you run about the world, exposing yourself to the inclemency of the weather? You might remain at the Santa Casa and serve mass." "Who would wish to employ me, clothed as I am?" replied Benedict. "That is nothing," replied the good priest, "I will obtain permission from the Superior, to give you a cassock and some other garments." "But they do not know me," objected Benedict. "I know you," quickly replied Father Valeri. Benedict cut the conversation short by saying "I will think it over." The next day Father Valeri met Benedict, and asked him what had been the result of his reflections. He simply answered: "It is not God's will I should lead such a life." "Would you rather," asked the priest, "become a Camaldoli hermit? It is an order that I esteem very highly on account of its solitude; then, although they live in community, they lead very solitary lives. There is a house of that order in this vicinity, not far from Ancona. I would willingly go there with you. To-morrow I will start for Sirolo, and if you wish it, I will go to Mount Conara to

speak to the religious." Benedict allowed him to finish, then raised his eyes to heaven, and said: "I will think it over."

The next day Father Valeri, as he had said, left for Sirolo, and was absent for several days, during which Benedict anxiously inquired a number of times about the good priest's return. Finally, as soon as he saw him, he firmly said: "God does not call me to that life."

Still, Father Gaspard Valeri felt in his heart, a strange attraction towards the poor young man. He was quite puzzled about him, and would have liked to solve the mystery that surrounded Benedict. Was he a young man of good family, who, influenced by grace, had fled from the seductions of an elegant and frivolous world to go and carry the love of Jesus Christ among the people? Or, was he a Jesuit, who, in order to remain faithful to his vocation, chose the rough and austere life of a pilgrim?

He profited by every occasion to speak a word to Benedict, so as to obtain some little information. One day, seeing him read the breviary, near the altar of the Annunciation, he asked him if he understood Latin. "A little," answered the beggar. "Have you been a religious?" added Father Valeri, and as Benedict acknowledged he had remained several months in a monastery of the Carthusian Order, he said: "And why did you not remain there?" "Because God did not wish it," replied Benedict. "Must we not be resigned to his will?" And he closed this con-

versation, which annoyed him. These short answers, and the tone of his voice, which was undoubtedly very modest, but, at the same time very firm, instead of discouraging Father Valeri, only excited his interest. I do not know what powerful charm attracted him toward this miserable beggar who was so different from other people. He scrutinized all his actions and deportment—what he saw, added to his edification.

Hidden from view behind a pillar, or in a dark corner of the church, Benedict Joseph would remain for long hours on his knees. Father Valeri never tired of watching him; he sometimes saw him tighten the cord that girdled his loins, and strike his breast; his face was often suffused with a roseate hue, while his eyes were fixed in ecstacy; sighs would escape from his breast, betraying the interior love which consumed him.

Observing Benedict Joseph thus closely, Father Valeri would say to himself: "This is truly a holy soul filled with the love of God." He endeavored in every way to win his confidence, and with perfect delicacy, rendered him every service in his power. Benedict Joseph did not fail to remark the benevolence of the worthy priest, and he appreciated it from the bottom of his heart. He knew, that by his order, the doors of the Santa Casa, were opened every time that he presented himself before them, and he was exceedingly grateful for such attention which was of a nature to touch his heart. Consequently, the rela-

tions between Father Valeri and the holy beggar became more friendly every day. Benedict never failed to call on the young priest, as soon as he arrived at Loreto, and Father Valeri, on his side, took delight in loading his friend with relics and rosaries, whenever he left for Rome. One day, in the year 1777, he even proposed that they should make the trip to Rome together. As Father Valeri had obtained an extraordinary grace, through the intercession of St. Philip of Neri, he wished to visit the tomb of the great Saint, in order to thank him for the favor received. Benedict sweetly disapproved his friend's proposal, assuring him, that he tarried too long on the "way." "How long," asked Gaspard—"a month?" "I cannot say," answered Blessed Benedict. "I follow no special road, and I stop wherever they are celebrating feasts." "That is right," replied Father Valeri; "you act like a true christian, and may every one imitate you!" "But, added he, "if, as I hope, I go to Rome, where shall I find you?" "At Santa Maria dei Monti," replied Benedict. Then, after a lapse of a few moments, Father Valeri said to his friend: "But, if I do not go to Rome, I beg of you to go to Church of the Oratorium, when you pass in that direction, and visit St. Philip's tomb, to return thanks unto this great Saint for me."

Benedict hesitated an instant, then, with a pleasant smile, he promised his friend, that he would make this visit once for him, but only once.

The following year, as soon as he saw Father

Valeri, he lost no time in telling him that he had made the promised visit to St. Philip of Neri.

When Benedict first commenced his pilgrimages to Santa Casa, his only shelter was the porch of the church, his bed the marble steps. Father Valeri, whose business in the sacristy, called him very early to the church, met him quite often in that place, stretched on the bare and cold stone, his head resting on a bundle of clothes. He could not understand how his delicate constitution could endure the damp night air. He therefore, entreated him to rest at least under the piazza of the Penitenziaria, or look for a lodging in the country. "Do you not know," said he, "that this cold pavement and the dampness of night may be the cause of your death?"

"It is God's will," replied the mendicant, "a beggar, such as I am, sleeps wherever he may happen to be, and he should not seek a comfortable bed. Besides, I like to be alone and to rest in peace." The kind hearted priest, desirous to mitigate his suffering, said: "You must not continue to punish your body in this manner; if you do, I will write to your parents, and advise them to recall you home." Benedict smiled, and was very careful not to say, who were his parents, nor where was his country.

Finally, being further importuned by the good young priest, to seek a more comfortable habitation, he showed his appreciation of the interest taken in him, by promising to return into the country every night and ask hospitality of the peasants.

Father Gaspard Valeri often accompanied him. They would leave Loreto together, by the marine gate, and take the road leading to the port of Ricanati. Father Gaspard could scarcely part with his friend; under one pretext or another, he delayed the moment of separation as long as possible. He sometimes, even accompanied him as far as his humble lodging, while conversing on pious and religious topics.

On one of these occasions he offered his poor friend a baiocio (a cent) to buy a little wine in a neighboring town. Benedict refused the alms so generously offered, and declared that he never drank wine, nor even entered an inn.

Very often the holy beggar, when wandering about, seeking a refuge for the night, received unkind refusals and cruel insults; no one cared to lodge, even in a stable, this disgusting beggar, who was covered with vermin. But he never showed the least uneasiness, nor uttered a complaint. He would knock at another door, rejoicing over these insults and refusals, which caused him to resemble his Divine Master.

For several years Benedict continued that sort of life, and no matter how great the distance he happened to be from the Basilica, he was always there early, before the doors were opened.

As we know, Benedict Joseph always made it a point to avoid the highways. He preferred unfrequented roads, so as not to be disturbed in his communion with God by the unwelcome presence of man. But, notwithstanding his love for solitude, he

could not avoid making a few acquaintances, and his pilgrimages to Loreto, brought about his singular meeting, with the ex-treasurer of the Shah of Persia, George Zitli.

George Zitli, who had been obliged to fly from his country, after a revolution in 1748, sought refuge in Moscovy.

There, the Lord bestowed on him the most precious of gifts; He gave him faith in exchange for all the honors he had lost. In course of time, he abjured Islamism, and embraced the Catholic religion. Henceforth, his thoughts ever turned towards the Eternal City, and, in 1778, he fixed his residence in Rome. He was then, no less than eighty-eight years of age, but, he was yet quite strong, and his mind very clear. He lived on a small monthly allowance, granted him by the Propaganda, and received some assistance from the Capuchin Monks.

In this same year, notwithstanding his advanced age, George Zitli made a pilgrimage to Loreto on foot. In the month of April, on his return home, he happened to pass through a small town, and, as he was very tired, he stopped at a tavern to rest and take some refreshments. As he was about to enter the house, he noticed a miserably clad beggar, who was leaning up against the wall, with his hands crossed on his breast, and his eyes cast upon the ground. Zitli, on beholding him, was filled with compassion, and was especially touched by the great modesty of the poor young man. He enquired if he was not very

tired, and if he did not wish for something to eat. The beggar (it was, as we have already mentioned, Benedict Joseph himself,) answered by an affirmative sign of the head, and the good old man immediately invited him to enter and share with him his modest meal. While they partook of the viands placed before them, they conversed on various subjects. The old man asked Benedict his name, and questioned him as to his country, his residence, his antecedents, and the object of his journey. Benedict answered: "My name is Joseph of Amette; I am French; I reside in Rome; I live as a pilgrim; I am going to Loreto." These were about the only words Benedict spoke in reply to the old gentleman's questions. George Zitli was far more explicit in acquainting his companion with his place of residence and his age. When Benedict heard that he was born in Persia, he quickly exclaimed: "Then you are not a christian?" The Persian hastened to assure him that he was. "Yes; thanks to Divine Mercy, I have been a christian for the last thirty years. I have acknowledged the errors of Mahomet, and have been received into the church of Jesus Christ."

"I congratulate you," replied Benedict, "remain and live faithfully in the bosom of the Church, and never doubt its doctrines." Then, thinking of himself, he said: "I am grateful to God for having been born in the true faith, and for having been brought up by catholic parents" As he pronounced these words,

his voice became firm, and his face assumed an angelic expression.

Becoming more communicative, Benedict spoke of his own history, and said he had lived some time in a convent. "Although, by the permission of God, I left the monastery," said he, "I hope, with Mary's help, to crush the serpent's head instead of being vanquished by it. I am always very happy, whenever I visit Loreto, and I thank God for giving me the necessary health and strength to go there every year." "Are you going to Loreto?" asked Zitli, "I have just left that place. When you reach the Holy House, say an 'Ave Maria' for my intention, and in return, I will recite one 'Our Father' for you at Saint Peter's, so that your journey home may be free from all accidents, and that we may meet soon again."

Having made this mutual promise, Zitli and Benedict parted, one going to Loreto, the other to Rome.

The next day, Zitli when passing through a hamlet, heard a woman say that her child had been cured by a poor young man, to whom she had given hospitality; he was emaciated and very pale; he had a reddish beard, and wore a ragged cloak. "I conducted him to the stable, where I made him a bed of straw," said the woman; "on the way he noticed that my child was seriously ill. He approached it, and laid his hands on its little head, and said to me: 'Be consoled, for your child will no longer suffer.' The child was relieved immediately, and fell into a peaceful sleep, which lasted the whole night. It has been well ever since."

Zitli, on hearing this narrative, thought immediately of his guest of the preceding evening, and he thanked God for having permitted him to meet such a great saint. He resolved, nevertheless, to sound Benedict himself on this subject. He first met him three months later, on the Piazza della Trinita de Monti. He quickly approached him, and enquired were he lodged. After they had conversed together for a few moments; Zitli asked him, if, when on his way to Loreto, he had not stopped in a small hamlet, where he spoke to a sick child. Benedict answered that he had remained but a very short time, as he was very anxious to reach the Santa Casa as quickly as possible. Zitli, greatly charmed with this humble answer, made a motion to take his hands in order to kiss them. But Benedict quickly drew them back and escaped from the good old man by entering the church.

A few years later, George Zitli, in speaking of Benedict Joseph during the preliminary investigations, paid him this splendid tribute: "I have traveled all over Europe, and a great part of Asia, and, although since my conversion to the Catholic religion, I have had the happiness of meeting many holy men, priests, and religious of various orders, and particularly with a Father Jean, a reformed Franciscan, of Castelfranco, in the domain of Venice, who was my confessor, I have never seen any one practice virtue so perfectly as Benedict."

Benedict Joseph continued to seek an asylum for

the night, in the country, relying on his holy angel guardian, in his choice of a place. One morning, in 1779, the roads were covered with snow, and the rivers, swollen by very heavy rains, were overflowing.

Delayed on the way, by so many obstacles, Benedict arrived at Loreto later than usual, exhausted from fatigue, foot-sore, covered with mud, and drenched to the skin. On the previous evening, having found people in all the neighboring farms, he was obliged to go towards the sea to find a solitary lodging. Sad and disconsolate, he complained to Father Valeri, not of his fatigue, but of the loss of time occasioned by the bad state of the roads and the great distance from the church. Father Valeri offered to find him a more convenient shelter. "Oh! yes," said Benedict, "it would be a great charity, provided I may be alone." Father Gaspard informed the man who had charge of the farm belonging to the Holy House, that, he would bring him a Saint, and asked him to prepare a room in the bakery.

The charitable priest wished to profit by this occasion, to change the ragged garments of his friend; therefore, he placed a bundle of clothes in a room destined for him, and when night had come, offered to conduct him thither. On the way, Father Valeri, pointed out to Benedict the spot where the Holy House first rested in its translation to Italy, and they both piously knelt on the sanctified ground. Then, continuing their walk, they conversed intently together

like two friends. As they were crossing the Sirolo road, Father Gaspard asked Benedict if he had ever gone to venerate the Crucifix of Sirolo, at the foot of the Ancona mountains. Benedict answered that he knew nothing of that city, or of that devotion. The priest then said: "I advise you to go there to-morrow."

They soon reached the farm which was to be the pilgrim's place of refuge. Father Valeri entered the house, but, Benedict modestly remained at the foot of the door steps, waiting to be conducted to the bakery, where he was to sleep. As soon as he entered, the good priest offered him the garments which had been sent in advance, and begged him to clothe himself in them immediately. He then retired, leaving Benedict alone with God.

Out of the whole bundle of clothes placed before him by Father Valeri, Benedict took but one undergarment, of which, says his Italian historian, "he was greatly in need." He was invited to supper, but he hesitated to accept, because he thought the bread was too white and too good for a poor beggar.

Father Valeri who was on his way to Ancona, stopped at the farm over night, to wait for daylight, in order to resume his journey. The room which he occupied, was adjoining Benedict's miserable abode, and during the night, he very distinctly heard him praying in French. The next morning, before sunrise the priest, being ready to start, knocked at the beggar's door, and as Benedict was still praying, he

recommended himself to his good prayers. "I will remember you," answered Benedict.

A few moments later, Benedict left the bakery, and with hurried steps, took the direction of Sirolo, where he venerated the Holy Crucifix, and then went to Loreto. That night, he returned to the farm, which continued to be his home, during the whole time of this pilgrimage.

After the suppression of the Jesuits, by order of Clement XIV., the religious were called to Our Lady of Loreto, the French chaplain of which, was Father Temple. "He was," says one of his superiors, "an exact and particular man, who was never satisfied with himself, although he was very pious, and his conduct exemplary." He was quite severe toward the poor who flocked to Loreto, saying that the greatest number of them were vagabonds, attracted thither through other motives than piety.

His office of chaplain, obliged him to watch over the pilgrims to the Holy House, and he was very conscientious in the discharge of his duty.

For some time, he had heard a certain French pilgrim praised very highly. It was said that he prayed continually, avoided the taverns, and was dressed somewhat like the novices of La Trappe. Notwithstanding all the details given him, it was several days, before Father Temple distinguished Benedict among the others.

On the 11th of February, 1776, when in his confessional, he noticed a modest beggar, who, from time to time, turned his eyes towards him. About noon,

after all the confessions had been heard, the poor man timidly approached the priest as though he wished to speak. "Are you French?" abruptly asked the religious. Benedict meekly and humbly replied: "Yes, Father." The religious asked him in a stern voice what he wanted. Benedict explained that, as he happened to be making a pilgrimage to the Holy House, and was, in all things, submissive to his confessor's will, he wished to obtain his permission to follow his usual manner of living.

"And what is your way of living?" asked the Father. "I am generally satisfied," replied Benedict, "with what is spontaneously offered me through charity." "And if nothing is offered you, what do you do?" continued the religious. "I apply to the convents."

"But" objected the Father, "you cannot find convents everywhere?"

"That is true," replied Benedict, "but I can always find eatables that are thrown from the windows. I find apple parings, spoiled fruit, and in fact, enough to sustain life." "But," said the chaplain very severely, "if you cannot find any of these remnants, do you wish to tempt God, and force him to perform miracles?" "I am not discouraged," answered Benedict, "I go into the country, and along the hedges and roadside I find an abundance of roots and herbs."

Father Temple, astonished at such a way of living, of which, he had never heard, until that moment, suspected a ruse, or to say the very least, an illusion. His face darkened, and he asked if such a method had

received the approbation of his spiritual directors. "Yes and no," frankly answered Benedict, "according to the inspiration of God, and I have always obeyed their commands." "Well then," replied Father Temple, in an imperious tone, "in virtue of holy obedience, I order you to accompany this pilgrim, (pointing with his finger to a poor man, modestly dressed,) and to eat whatever he will give you. Then you must return to me this very day, with your certificates and passports, and prepare for confession." Benedict joyously approached the pilgrim, and remained with him as he had been ordered.

Father Temple did not know what to think of the beggar whom Providence had sent him. Benedict had made a deep impression on him, and he was greatly perplexed with all he had seen and heard. He did not know to which sentiment he should yield, and perhaps, for the first time, he began to doubt the opinion he had formed of pilgrims in general.

In the afternoon Benedict returned to the chaplain, bringing with him his certificates as requested. Father Temple received him very gruffly. For some time, he had been talking with two other pilgrims whose papers were not satisfactory. This little incident pained him very much, and predisposed him to believe that Benedict also wished to deceive him, in order to receive alms. The religious found Benedict's papers in perfect order, and drawn up in terms of the highest praise. His suspicions were beginning to disappear, when he asked Benedict where he came from. Learn-

ing that he had just left Rome, he expressed the wish to see his certificates of confession and communion. Instead of answering, the pilgrim was silent, his head was bowed, his eyes cast down, and his hands crossed on his breast. The chaplain repeated his request, and as Benedict remained perfectly silent, Father Temple upbraided him for thus visiting the shrines without approaching the sacraments, and said he was either a heretic or a hypocrite.

Benedict's attitude, whilst listening to the reproaches, was humble, but firm. "Are you deaf or dumb?" cried the religious, "have you not understood me? Why do you not answer?" Benedict did not answer, and Father Temple knew not how to interpret his silence. The beggar's modesty touched him deeply, and caused him to experience strange sensations, but this obstinate silence puzzled him. "He is a great saint," thought the chaplain, to himself, "or a great sinner."

And in the book, in which was recorded the information concerning each pilgrim, his appreciation of Benedict bore the traces of the sentiments which divided his heart. And, when entering the holy beggar's name in the book, he wrote beside it the following sentence: "*Suspected of heresy or hypocrisy.*" But, thinking better of it, he erased these words, and wrote the following: "*Suspected of great contempt for himself.*"

The chaplain dismissed the three pilgrims, enjoining them to prepare their confession for the next day, and then, knelt before the crucifix to implore light

from God, so that he might pass an equitable judgment upon Benedict.

The following day Benedict Joseph was in Father Temple's confessional, and on the latter's formal demand, he spoke of his confessions and communions. Since his departure from Rome, he had gone to confession and received communion at Assisi. When at Rome, he generally went to confession at the Basilica of the Lateran, and received Holy Communion, according to the will of his directors. "Why then," said the chaplain, "did you not tell me these things yesterday?" "Father," replied Benedict, "it was owing to the presence of those other French pilgrims; they would have perhaps, believed me to be that which I am not." This answer was as a ray of light that dispelled the chaplain's remaining doubts. Still, before allowing the pilgrim to approach the sacraments, he wished to form an idea of his religious instruction; therefore, he questioned him on different articles of faith. Benedict expressed himself very clearly, with regard to the mysteries of religion, and its eternal truths; his knowledge of christian doctrine was as perfect as possible. The good priest was delighted.

After having thus catechised his penitent, Father Temple, told him to accuse himself of his sins. Benedict commenced to recite the *Confiteor*. He trembled in every limb, and shed abundant tears, like a man about to receive his sentence of death.

The confessor, thinking that he was ill, and that a violent fever was setting in, said to Benedict: "You

are not well; postpone your confession, and go to the hospital." Father," answered Benedict, "I am not sick."

"Then why do you tremble?" asked the chaplain. "Father," replied Benedict, "should not a criminal tremble at the thoughts of his guilt and shame?" On hearing these words, the confessor thought he would be obliged to listen to the avowal of great crimes; but, what was his astonishment, when, instead of sins, Benedict disclosed to him nothing but the natural imperfections of human nature. The beggar accused himself of not having loved his God as much as he should have done; of not having been sufficiently grateful for divine favors received; of not having corresponded to the graces that had been showered upon him, and which were enough to make a saint out of the greatest sinner.

While he made this confession, the sorrow which filled his soul, was apparent in his whole person, and in the big tears that fell from his eyes to the ground, which was quite moistened by them. Father Temple was deeply touched; and, probably recalling what he had heard concerning Benedict's horror of everything resembling praise, he commenced to scold him in an apparently unkind manner. "Really," said he, "you do not know how to confess yourself. I, myself, will make your examination of conscience. In the name of holy obedience, I command you to answer all my questions, by saying either *yes* or *no*." Then, with admirable prudence and wisdom, he pro-

ceeded to question the penitent on the commandments of God, and the precepts of the Church. This careful examination only tended to prove the perfect innocence of Benedict's soul. Not only was this young man of twenty-seven years free from all mortal sin, but even from all willful venial ones.

The confessor's admiration increased in proportion as Benedict allowed him to penetrate into the sanctuary of his heart. Never before had such an angel knelt at his feet. Still, the priest desired further proofs. Had Benedict never tarnished the beautiful white robe received in baptism? This question presented itself to his mind, and before passing judgment on the pious beggar, he resolved to have the matter decided. Therefore, retaining his stern voice, he said to him: "Probably you have never made a general confession; or if you have, you must have done so without specifying your accusations." He straightway searched the inmost recesses of Benedict's heart, and with scrupulous care, examined all his actions, scrutinized all his thoughts, and all desires, and made him repeat the words he generally used since the first years of his childhood. Benedict's soul stood the test. Purity had always been its brightest ornament, and it had never been sullied by aught, that was improper. "I cannot express my admiration and astonishment, on discovering this wonderful soul," relates Father Temple.

"I praised and blessed God, and could not restrain my tears, on beholding so much holiness in a young

man alone in the world, deprived of every comfort, and far from his country and friends, exposed to endless temptations, the sole guardian of his innocence being the grace of God."

Not finding sufficient matter for absolution, the confessor did not dare absolve the beggar. After giving him a mere blessing, he told him to approach the Holy Table that same morning and receive Holy Communion. Then, dismissing Benedict Joseph, he invited him to return in the evening. Father Temple was quite convinced of the eminent holiness of his penitent, and being more and more desirous to become perfectly acquainted with that predestined soul, he conceived the idea of holding spiritual conferences with the holy youth on different christian virtues.

These conferences took place that same day, and the two following days, in the morning and evening; sometimes in the confessional, sometimes at the Penitenziaria; they lasted each time several hours.

From the very beginning, Father Temple met with an obstacle which he had foreseen, viz.: the great humility of the holy beggar.

How was he to make this young man speak of his life, and of his virtues, knowing that Benedict never felt aught but contempt for himself? To obviate this difficulty, the religious employed a thousand stratagems. Sometimes he questioned him indirectly, sometimes he had recourse to harsh words, assuming that his penitent was inclined to a vice contrary to the virtue he wished to discover, and finally, he made use of the

best means for finding out everything, viz. : he commanded him to reply in the name of holy obedience. Poor Benedict suffered greatly during these hours of conference. On the one hand, his humility suggested a concealment of his good works, for fear he might pass for a holy man, and on the other, his docility in answering all that was asked of him in the name of holy obedience, obliged him to omit nothing.

His soul was racked by these two sentiments which were opposed to each other ; large drops of perspiration would cover his brow, while abundant tears fell from his eyes. "Each one of my questions," said Father Temple, "appeared to affect him strangely ; it seemed as though a steel knife was being driven into his flesh."

These conferences produced in the chaplain's mind a strong and firm conviction of Benedict's sublime holiness. He does not know how to express his admiration, in the narrative he has left us of his relations with the beggar. He says : "To give a proper description of Benedict's heart, it would be necessary to experience in the same degree, the inspiration and impulses of the Holy Ghost." One moment he calls him Saint Alexius, and the next Saint Aloysius. He compares him to his father, the great and glorious patriarch Saint Francis of Assisi. "The love of Jesus crucified," says he, "filled his soul, and he wept over the sacred wounds of his God, as a mother weeps over her only son's sufferings. Once I discoursed on the Passion of our Lord," continues he,

"Benedict Joseph cried out with all the strength of his love: 'O, holy wounds, so apt to touch hearts of stone! O, holy wounds, so powerful in melting hearts of ice!'" The thought of God was constantly present to his mind, and neither could the many things he saw on his way during the day, nor sleep at night, take his mind from his Creator. "To express," continues the Father, "the ardor which consumed that great servant of God, I should have to use the words of the Seraphic Doctor, Saint Bonaventure, in speaking of our Seraphic Father, Saint Francis: "He was like a burning coal, absorbed in the flames of divine love; at the very mention of God's love he seemed to receive new life, and became inflamed, as though the cords of his heart had been touched by a divine hand. Everything seemed to make him think of his Well-Beloved; the flowers of the fields; the blossoms of the garden—in fact all nature."

"He prayed unceasingly, and even in the streets, he could be heard conversing with God. And when he performed this pious exercise, which, in his eyes, appeared the most precious, he seemed to belong to a new world, and no longer to have a thought for this valley of tears."

Even in his youth, Benedict had been the object of these divine favors, and he never failed to correspond to grace. Well aware that the Holy Ghost communicates himself more intimately to the soul that shuns the tumult of the world, he sought solitude, and always preferred the least frequented churches.

Father Temple was in ecstacy over all the wonders that grace had wrought in the beggar's soul; but what pleased him even more perhaps, was his penitent's extensive knowledge of christian doctrine, and the ease and confidence with which he expressed himself when speaking of things appertaining to religion "He might be called another Theresa," says he, "so closely did his sentiments resemble all we read in ascetic books, concerning that saint."

During the course of the conferences, Father Temple referred to Benedict's wandering life, and he blamed those idle people who, deserting the work of the fields, or running away from the work-shop, go with staff in hand, and beg from door to door, thus getting their bread without fatigue. "To lead such a life," said he vehemently, "there must be an evident vocation. God alone, in fact, can substitute another kind of penance—a life of pilgrimage, for the common penitential work imposed on all mankind." "Father," immediately replied Benedict, "a priest recently advised me to become a Camaldoli Monk at Monte Conaro. If you think I would do well to follow his advice, I will leave immediately." "No, my son," answered the priest, suddenly arising and obeying a superior impulse, "No; God does not call you to that life." And, in pronouncing these words, he had so little control over himself that he did not doubt that he had been the echo of God's will.

Father Temple would have liked to more fully study that privileged soul so intimately united to God; so

splendidly adorned with the dazzling brightness of innocence, and illuminated by the rays of Divine Love. But, he was filled with deep compassion for the mental sufferings of his penitent, who seemed to beg to be spared further questioning. He did not dare press him further. Moreover, the few hours that he had passed in contact with that poor man, covered with rags and vermin, more than sufficed to form in him the following judgment: "that one day, God would certainly glorify Benedict Joseph, and the Church raise altars in his honor." He thought he would be called upon to testify with regard to him, and he hastily wrote down his various impressions on pages, that will remain the most beautiful title to glory "*of this great, admirable, and holy Frenchman, Benedict Joseph Labre.*" *

An unexpected incident put an end to these conferences, which God seemed to allow, in order to bring to light the virtues of his child.

Benedict had scarcely left the confessional, when some pilgrims approached the chaplain and said to him: "Oh! Father, what a great saint you have just confessed. He is a new Alexius! He is another Saint Aloysius!" And they vied with each other in praising Blessed Benedict's spirit of prayer, poverty and penance.

These flattering words reached Benedict's ears. Instantly, contrary to his usual reserve and quiet manner of walking in church, he fled as though a

* These are Father Temple's own words.

thunderbolt had fallen at his feet. A few days later, he left Loreto, resolved, not only never again to enter Father Temple's confessional, but also to avoid meeting him.

As he was leaving the city, he met a band of vagabonds, who were uttering horrible blasphemies. He approached them, and in an humble, but firm voice, reproached them for uttering such language. The only answer these miserable men gave him, was to attack him, and shower curses and blows upon him. Two horsemen rode up, who defended him, and liberated him from the cowards. "Do not interfere with these people," said Benedict, "they are only treating me as I deserve. If you knew me, you would see that I merit worse than this." Such great meekness touched the bandits, and two of them hastened to Loreto, to confess, and reform their lives.

By God's permission, it was at Father Temple's feet these two unfortunate men sought absolution for their misdeeds.

On the following years, Benedict Joseph never went near the chaplain's confessional. The latter would have liked to resume his former relations with the beggar. On every occasion he tried to speak to him, he even called him on the street to offer him alms, but all to no avail.

Father Temple consoled himself for his failure, by inducing the other pilgrims to bring him news of his dear penitent, and he often said when speaking of Benedict; "He is a saint, and a great saint."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SORI FAMILY.

THE slightest praise was exceedingly distasteful to Benedict, and he always most carefully avoided those who professed the least admiration for him. Father Temple discovered this during his frequent interviews with the pious youth; others learned it later, and among them was the farmer of the Holy House, to whose home Gaspard Valeri had conducted Benedict, and who sheltered the blessed beggar every night under his roof.

It was not long before Benedict Joseph noticed that he was the object of most careful attentions at the farm, where his name was very often mentioned in terms of the highest praise. Nothing more was necessary in order to induce Benedict Joseph to leave his present asylum. He went to Valeri, in whom he had implicit confidence, and acquainted him with his resolution, giving for reason, the bad condition of the roads, the distance of the farm from the church, and the loss of his strength. He inquired if he could not find lodgings a little nearer to the Santa Casa.

Father Valeri first offered his holy friend a home in his house, but as his mother and sisters resided with him, Benedict feared to intrude.

There was a pious family living in the city of the name of Sori, who kept a small store containing religious objects, and an inn for the accommodation of the pilgrims. They had often admired the great piety of the mendicant, and they were sure, that this young man, so poorly clad, was a saint. His miserable raiment touched them less than the modesty that shone in his whole person, and they were always happy whenever they had an opportunity to see him. A glorious halo, which was undoubtedly the brilliant reflection of his beautiful soul, seemed in their eyes to shine upon his pure brow, and embellish it with a heavenly charm. They desired to make his acquaintance, so that they might at least speak to him, but they did not dare to make any advances—a sort of respect held them back. Benedict's modest deportment in the street impressed them nearly as much as his devout demeanor in the church. When at home, they spoke of nothing else but the virtues of the beggar of the Holy House, of his fervor in prayer, and of the miserable rags that covered him.

They did not only speak of him among themselves, but also among their friends and neighbors.

One day Father Valeri stopped in front of Barbara Sori's store, and the conversation turned upon Benedict Joseph. Barbara was aware of the friendship existing between the beggar and the priest. Father

Valeri avowed, that, for some days past, he had been seeking a lodging for him. Barbara said she would willingly take him and that she would mention it to her husband, but when the priest proposed to pay the rent, she quickly rejected the offer. "My husband and I will be delighted to receive him," answered Barbara. Then she pointed out the room in the house which they would give him, and even offered garments to replace his rags.

Gaudentius Sori highly approved of Barbara's proposal. They hastily made up a bundle of clothes, and sent it to Father Valeri's house. Benedict accepted nothing but a woolen undergarment. He refused to give up his torn cloak, under the pretext that it had touched the walls of the Holy House, and on account of this fact, was infinitely precious to him.

The Sori family impatiently awaited the arrival of the servant of God. Several days had already elapsed and Benedict had not yet appeared; Barbara was inconsolable. She again spoke to Father Valeri, but he could not account for Benedict's absence. In despair she sent her servant, Diamante, to speak to Benedict. Diamante knew the holy beggar, for she, as well as her master, had remarked his pious attitude in the basilica, and had even made bold enough to offer him alms. She ran directly to the church and there found Benedict kneeling before the altar. "The lady," softly said Diamante, "who sent you the clothes by Father Gaspard, offers you her house for shelter during the night. It is true, you will be lodged very

poorly there, but you will be free to do as you please."

On hearing these words Benedict raised his eyes to heaven, then said: "I accept that charitable offer."

This answer created a great sensation in the Sori family. They hastened to arrange the room designed for the beggar, which was the darkest and most delapidated in the house. It was situated over the workshop, and was lighted only by a very narrow window. They prepared a small bed and brought in a few pieces of furniture—the oldest and worst they could find in the house. When everything was ready, they awaited their honored guest, for whom all their preparations had been made. Never was a loved monarch, returning from distant and bloody wars, more impatiently desired than was this poor man by his new friends. The days seemed interminable! Hours dragged by so slowly until nightfall!

Fearing that he might get lost in the streets, they sent Diamante to wait for him at the church door. The whole family joyfully anticipated his coming.

Benedict finally did come, guided by Diamante. He carried his cloak on his arm, his staff in his hand, and his traveling bag was thrown over his shoulder. "Praised be Christ," said he, addressing husband and wife. Barbara conducted him to the room prepared for him. Benedict expressed much surprise on seeing the room so well furnished.

"What is the use of so much luxury," said he, "it is all too nice for a poor man like me."

Barbara assured him that this was the worst room in the house.

"Then," continued he, "why did you set up that bed? A few handfuls of straw would have sufficed for a beggar. I should prefer to be in a corner down stairs."

Barbara explained that lower down there was nothing but the cellar; and besides, she said he was free to use the bed, or to stretch upon the floor.

Then she conducted him to the kitchen, where a modest repast had been prepared and the table spread. Gaudentius invited him to take supper.

"Oh! this is too much charity! Is it not enough to lodge me? Do you also wish to board me?" Barbara had also prepared a dainty supper which according to the beggar, seemed incompatible with the spirit of poverty; an exceedingly white cloth covered the table, and a large loaf lay beside the few dishes of eatables.

"The poor," exclaimed he, "should eat nothing but the leavings."

Barbara endeavored to banish the scruples of her guest, and she promised him crusts for the future; as for the table cloth, she explained that it served to gather the crumbs. Benedict still hesitated to sit down. Then Gaudentius and Barbara ordered him to do so. Benedict obeyed; he raised his eyes to heaven as if to take God as a witness to the violence that was done him, and he tasted a little, very little of the dishes offered him. After this meagre repast, when

he had reached the dreary place he honored with the name of room, he required them to lock the door.

"You do not know me," said he, "so you should be prudent."

But Gaudentius refused. Benedict insisted again and more strongly: they were forced to accede to his request.

The next morning when Gaudentius went to unlock the door, he found him on his knees pouring out his soul in fervent prayer.

After the third day, he ceased to lock his guest in his room. But Benedict remained there just the same, until they came to open the door; and if the store door happened to be closed, he waited until some one came to open it also.

"Why do you not open the door yourself?" asked Gaudentius one day.

"I am not in a hurry," he answered.

And notwithstanding all their earnest entreaties on this point, he never swerved from this line of conduct. Had he done otherwise, he would have considered his actions wholly inconsistent with his title of *beggar*.

On leaving his lodging Benedict always went directly to the basilica, where he spent the entire day. Barbara Sori often begged him to return home at noon-day, in order to take a little nourishment with them, but her entreaties were vain. Benedict did not find the hours long, when in meditation at the foot of the altar. How could he curtail those precious

hours, when the day scarcely sufficed for his prayers! How could he afford to lose even one minute!

As we remember, Barbara promised Benedict that in the future his meals should be less extravagant than the first one she had prepared for him; she kept her word, an old cloth replaced the snowy linen of the first day; and in place of the fine loaf that had scandalized him so much, she served broken pieces of bread and soup in which she mixed some meat and a few vegetables.

Still, notwithstanding all her good will, Barbara could not always avoid wounding Benedict's sensitive feelings. He often meekly complained of the abundance and quality of the food given him. Barbara had a ready answer for every objection; but she was particularly fond of reciting certain texts of the Gospel which worked wonders in the heart of the beggar. She recalled to him that our Lord advised His Apostles to eat whatever was placed before them. On hearing these words Benedict would bow his head and consent to eat a little of what had been served. Generally he ate very little, and the Sori family often wondered how a single evening meal could keep life in his emaciated body, which was worn out by the fatigues of travel and the severities of penance.

Barbara and Gaudentius would have liked to alleviate the sufferings which he seemed to endure, and make him consent to take a little more care of his shattered health. Consequently, in order to shelter him from the inclemency of the weather, they offered him

garments a little less worn out than those he possessed. But it was all to no avail, for Benedict declared that he was perfectly happy dressed as he was. One day, however, he consented to accept an old hat and a pair of shoes; the hat and shoes that he had been wearing were so shabby that the servant hastened to throw them away. When Gaudentius and Barbara heard of this, they were annoyed, for they had a presentiment that one day Benedict would be glorified, and that his rags would become relics.

"Do you not know," said Barbara, greatly incensed, "that one day, these cast-off articles will be considered more precious than the crowns of kings?"

On another occasion, having accepted a waistcoat which was comparatively good, he carefully hid it under his cloak and smiling, said: "A beggar should not parade his handsome garments."

Sacred history relates that the ark of the covenant brought down the blessings of heaven on Obed—Edom's family, because he had sheltered it. Benedict Joseph was also a source of blessings to the Sori family. God rewarded them in a visible manner, for their charity to His child.

For some time Barbara and Gaudentius were far from succeeding in their business; their little trade was not reliable, purchasers were scarce, and the returns amounted to almost nothing; besides they owed about two hundred dollars, and the future looked dark to them.

One evening Gaudentius confided to Benedict Jo-

seph the embarrassing state of his finances. Benedict listened to his lamentations in perfect silence, but from time to time, he raised his eyes heavenward.

On another occasion Gaudentius spoke to him again on the same subject, and Benedict, without answering a word, raised his eyes to heaven, as before. Gaudentius would have gladly spoken again and again of his anxieties and troubles, for it seemed to console him to thus open his heart to his friend; but Barbara advised him not to do so, for fear of annoying their guest.

Henceforth, Benedict never entered the house at night, without asking Gaudentius if he had been very busy in his store throughout the day, if he had had many purchasers, and if his profits were good. "Be it as it may," relates Gaudentius, "during the three years that Benedict remained in my house, the customers and the sales increased daily. I was enabled to pay all my debts, and my business is in the most prosperous condition; truly the providence of God entered my house with this blessed young man." Barbara was also convinced of this, as well as Gaudentius.

Husband and wife became more and more attached to Benedict, in proportion as they understood the mysteries of his life. They never tired speaking of him, and they were profuse in their thanks to God for being allowed to harbor him. Even the children seemed to regard him with respect and affection. The eldest, Marianna, who later, became a religious,

was scarcely six years of age, and the youngest, Joseph, about two. In the afternoon, on returning from school, they always inquired for the poor man, in order to wish him good-day. "Why do they wish to see me?" inquired Benedict, "it is not worth while troubling one's self to see a wolf."

Nevertheless, on entering the house, he always greeted them with a smile, and made some pleasant remark.

The time had now come for Benedict to leave Loreto for Rome. Twenty-two days had already elapsed since he went to live with the Sori family, who found that the time had passed with the rapidity of lightning.

When he was leaving, Barbara tried to slip a small piece of money into his hand.

"You will use it," added she, "to buy a little wine on the way, for your strength is almost gone."

Benedict refused the alms.

"The water in the ditches is good enough," said he, "to quench a beggar's thirst."

He added that if he had taken wine in their house it had been through obedience. And throwing his bundle over his shoulder, he repaired to the basilica, there to murmur a farewell prayer in the Holy House,

It was noon when he returned to the Sori family. Barbara offered him some refreshments, but he refused, saying he was not accustomed to partake of food at that hour, still he accepted a piece of bread, which he threw into his wallet.

Gaudentius experienced an indescribable emotion

when he saw him depart; he was so deeply attached to Benedict that this separation caused him a real sacrifice. He asked to be allowed to accompany him as far as Monreale. When at last he was obliged to take leave of him, Gaudentius said he would expect him the following year, and he hoped he would again honor him by occupying the miserable little room in his house. He also asked Benedict to write to him, to which he replied: "What is the use? what good would it do? we will meet again if it is God's will."

Gaudentius returned to his house much cast down, and was unable to restrain his tears, when repeating Benedict's last words to his wife.

The following year, 1781, at the beginning of Lent, they began to expect Benedict at Loreto. The Sori family spoke incessantly of him, and of the happiness it would be to see him and speak with him again. . . . So impatient were they to see him that days seemed like centuries.

However, Lent passed away and Benedict had not yet reached Loreto. The feast of Easter came and went, and still they had no tidings of the holy beggar.

As usual, Benedict left Rome about the middle of Lent, but was detained on the way by an accident that prevented him from reaching Loreto at the usual time.

Just as he was passing Monte Lupone, he was surprised by a violent storm; the rain fell in torrents, and as it was night and extremely dark, Benedict, who

was literally drenched, was forced to seek a shelter; besides it was impossible to advance another step, owing to the bad condition of the road. He saw an isolated house by the roadside. Approaching it, he cowered, wet and trembling, at the foot of the stairs.

Almost at the same moment, Joseph Anthony Pallotti, the eldest son of the owner, happened to step out and on beholding the poor man, invited him to enter and pass the night at the farm. Benedict asked to be permitted to retire to the bakery, whereupon Joseph offered him the stable which the beggar gladly accepted. His humble spirit rejoiced in the thought of passing the night in such a poor abode.

Joseph Anthony's father and brother were disgusted with the stranger's appearance, and both experienced a certain sentiment of distrust. In fact, the beggar, dressed as he was, greatly resembled the banditti of the melodrama. His gray cloak, covered with mud, and hanging in tatters; the cord that girdled his waist, and from which hung a black satchel; the bag thrown over his shoulders; his long and unkempt beard; his shoes trodden down at the heel, his battered hat; all tended to alarm the brave country people. But Benedict's face, radiant with honesty and purity, soon dispelled the first bad impression. His hosts began to have a little more confidence in him. A sympathetic chord, touched by an invisible hand, vibrated in their hearts, and they were filled with compassion for the unknown mendicant.

They offered him refreshments, which Benedict gratefully accepted. While he was partaking of this slight refection, he informed his new benefactors that he came from Bologna, but that he resided in Rome, where he was lodged through charity; that he had just arrived from Morrovalle and was on his way to Loreto.

The two brothers prepared a bed for him in the stable, which consisted of a little straw over which was thrown a coverlet. Benedict wished them good night with a pleasant smile, then retired to rest. An hour later when Joseph Anthony returned to lock the stable door, he found the poor man kneeling immovable in prayer, his arms extended, and his eyes raised to heaven. The next morning, when he went to open the stable, he found Benedict in the same attitude, kneeling on the bare ground and wrapt in contemplation. He told his brother all that he had seen. They were both convinced they had sheltered a saint, and resolved to profit by his presence among them.

Like most of peasants, they were more attached to the things of this world than to those of heaven. Therefore they resolved to ask him which would be the lucky number in a certain lottery, for they felt sure that this holy man possessed the gift of foresight. But they were at a loss to know how to question him; and after considerable reflection they concluded to make indirect inquiries. They therefore asked him if at Rome, he had ever assisted at the distribution of prizes in a lottery. At first Benedict did not answer,

but as they reiterated their question, he finally said in a loud voice:

"What distribution of prizes? What lottery? Should the poor meddle with such things?"

The brothers were abashed at this reply, and did not dare question him further, but this did not lessen their respect and affection for him; when he was taking leave of them, they offered him a loaf of bread to sustain him during his tiresome journey, and although the mendicant refused at first, they finally overcame his objections and made him accept it.

Benedict set out for Loreto, and as he was exhausted from fatigues of the preceding day, his progress was much slower than he would have wished. He lingered long on the way, and reached Loreto only toward the end of the Easter week.

One morning, as Gaudentius Sori was returning from church, he met him on Via della Pescheria; he was overjoyed to meet his friend once more, and begged him to go to his house immediately.

"I will visit the Madonna first," said Benedict, "then I will go to your house, and request you to lodge me for charity's sake."

Then Benedict repaired to the Holy House, where he remained until night, forgetful of the suffering and weariness of his poor exhausted body.

Toward evening, Gaudentius stationed himself at the door of the church, and when Benedict appeared he triumphantly conducted him to his little house. On entering, he greeted the family in his usual

manner, by praising the name of God, and then said to them :—

"You wish to receive me under your roof again this year? Shall I not trouble you?"

"No, no," immediately replied Barbara; "you make us very happy by remaining with us; now go to your room, and lay away your traveling bag. I beg you to make yourself at home, and try to rest your weary body."

Benedict did as he was commanded, and after having disposed of his bundle, he returned to the kitchen, where he took a little nourishment, which he greatly needed after his long fast.

Barbara Sori reproached herself many times for not having oftener made use of the holy name of obedience, whenever she wished to save Benedict some of the sufferings which he inflicted upon himself. But she resolved that in future she would make good use of it; this strong argument before which Benedict's objections vanished. The very next day she began to make use of this magic word. She noticed that his undergarments were quite soiled. She mentioned it to Benedict and requested him to give them, so that he might have them washed. She told him that he would find the articles required to change in his room. "It will do no good," said Benedict.

"It will do a great deal of good," replied Barbara, "for if you were taken suddenly ill on the street, and sent to a hospital, you would feel pleased to know

that your undergarments were in perfect order. I ask it of you in the name of holy obedience."

Benedict bowed his head in submission, and when Barbara returned his linen neatly washed and ironed, he thanked her as though he had received the greatest favor. By employing the same means the good woman, on another occasion, succeeded in making him accept a woolen jacket as well as a pocket-handkerchief.

Barbara Sori would have liked to renew his whole wardrobe in this manner, but she had not sufficient courage to ask for his cloak, for she knew how highly he prized it, because it had touched the walls of the Santa Casa. But she ingeniously found another way out of the difficulty. She decided to make him a large outer garment whose ample folds would completely cover his rags, and hide everything about him displeasing to the eye.

When Benedict saw the cloak and understood Barbara's intention, he was so grieved and alarmed that the pious woman did not dare force him to accept it in the name of obedience, for fear of causing mortal pain to the illustrious beggar.

It is to be hoped that the reader will pardon details, which seem almost too insignificant to warrant mention, but there is a charm in them that is irresistible. Besides, they give us a knowledge of Benedict's sublime virtue, and show us how much respect and affection were lavished on him by those who, notwithstanding the rags and vermin with which he was cov-

ered, saw in him a soul of wonderful beauty and purity. Were these pages written for those who proudly style themselves free thinkers, whilst in reality, they are only poor thinkers, I would suppress these facts, for they would certainly consider them beneath their notice; but I address those devout christians who treasure in mind and heart the least circumstances connected with the lives of our saints, and who glean facts concerning them with something of the same care that the priest observes in gathering particles of the sacred host.

And, if by chance, a free thinker has opened these pages, and perused them until the present moment, let him acknowledge that he has deserted his camp, and already set his foot within that of the true children of God.

It was not only in regard to raiment that Barbara Sori found it difficult to overcome Benedict's scruples, but also when there was question of food,—he always thought they took too much care of him and that his food was too palatable and too plentiful.

"Do you forget that I am a poor man?" asked he.

"I remember it very well," answered Barbara, "and it is precisely because you are a poor man that you should not prevent us from helping you in your distress."

They noticed that whenever he was left alone at table, he scarcely ate anything. Consequently whenever Gaudentius or Barbara could not remain with him, Diamante, whose heart often ached for the poor

young man, endeavored to perform the task imposed on her to the best of her ability; she induced him, entreated him, and often even forced him to eat.

"The guardian of the Holy House," said she, "wishes you to eat whatever is placed before you."

Benedict Joseph made it a rule, while a guest in a strange house, never to dispense with that deference and respect due to his host, and notwithstanding the numberless invitations he received to make himself at home and consider himself as a member of the family, he always waited to enter his room, or to sit down to table, until he had received a formal order to do so from Gaudentius or from Barbara; then, and then only, would he approach the table and sparingly partake of the eatables laid thereon. But he always complained that his hosts were too careful of his miserable body, and the food was too good for him.

Barbara and Gaudentius strove with as many comforts as possible, to alleviate the sufferings to which Benedict subjected himself, and endeavored to check the ardor of this fervent soul who sought humiliations and mortifications, as much as others seek the honors and enjoyments of this world. Together they formed a charitable conspiracy, which was directed against the holy mendicant.

We are aware of the tender affection that existed between Father Valeri and Benedict, and the influence exercised by the former on the pious youth. Barbara and Gaudentius often made use of this influ-

ence to obtain their end. Father Gaspard, to whom they had confided their pious plans, would drop in at supper-time, as though by chance. While in presence of the priest, Benedict's deportment was, if possible, more respectful and modest than usual; he always remained standing, his head uncovered. Father Gaspard always spoke kindly to the beggar, and seemed to take paternal interest in him; he would advise him to partake of his repast, and Benedict, in order to please his devoted friend, would accept, first one thing, then another, which he would not have taken at Barbara's request; he would eat a little bread and taste everything that was offered him. Such occasions were real holidays for the Sori family; they congratulated themselves on the success of their plan, and would not have exchanged their innocent victory for the laurels of the most valiant warrior.

One evening Father Valeri told Barbara that Benedict would be grateful if some one would give him a rosary. Barbara hastened to her store and chose a pair with large beads strung together with strong brass wire, to which were affixed handsome medals and a crucifix of the same metal. Benedict thanked Barbara in a few dignified and modest words, and hung the beads around his neck. He kept them during the remainder of his life, and, we had the happiness of seeing what is left of them, during a pilgrimage to his tomb in the Eternal City.

Benedict was deeply touched by the Sori family's devotion to him, and he was at a loss to know how to

express his thanks. "Pray for us," sometimes said Gaudentius when he saw him leaving in the morning for church, "remember us when you are before the Madonna." Benedict would bow his head and answer: "I am obliged to do so."

Nevertheless he was always reserved and discreet in his relations with his new friends, which we might think strange, did we not know that this reserve and discretion proceeded from eminent holiness. He never sat down to table or helped himself to anything without first being told to do so by Barbara. To do otherwise would have seemed to him in direct opposition to that spirit of dependence and subordination which he considered the distinguishing mark and ornament of the poor. Neither would he enter Gaudentius' store if customers were present, for fear of interfering with his business.

One very dark night, Benedict did not return at the usual hour, and Barbara, who was as anxious about him as a mother for her child, listened to every little noise in the street to see if she could not recognize the footsteps of her dear mendicant.

For the tenth time at least, she peered through the window, to see if Benedict were coming. Finally she noticed an immovable shadow leaning against a wall, directly opposite, and on closer inspection, she discovered it was Benedict; his eyes were cast down on the ground, and his arms were crossed on his breast.

Barbara hastily left the house, and approaching him said: "Why did you not come home?" "I was

not in a hurry," answered Benedict, "and besides, I must not interfere with the customers."

This same fear troubled him when he saw Barbara busily engaged in the kitchen, preparing his evening meal, while the store was filled with purchasers; he feared she was ministering to his wants, when she should be at the counter. He often expressed these fears to Barbara, and would feel fully reassured only when she would tell him, that Gaudentius was in the store, and that she was not at all needed there.

As we have already said, the Sori family, besides selling religious objects, kept a sort of an inn for the accommodation of the pilgrims. It kept them busy from morning until night to wait upon the customers and to attend to their innumerable household duties. On one occasion Barbara complained to Benedict of her endless occupation, saying she had scarcely a moment to give to God and her soul. The gentle youth listened to her with the greatest kindness, then said: "Happiness is not to be found here below. This world is but a valley of tears. We shall find consolation beyond the tomb." What an admirable maxim! It is the only one that calms the stormy waves of hatred and rebellion, which rage in the laborer's heart, when he beholds the privileged ones of the earth, surrounded by every luxury, while he is obliged to earn his daily bread in the sweat of his brow; it is the only one that will help him to bless his sufferings and carry his heavy cross with resignation.

Two weeks had scarcely elapsed since his arrival

at Loreto, when he informed the Sori family that he was about to take his leave of them. Barbara expressed surprise that he should go so soon, and tried in vain to keep him a little longer. When she saw her efforts were useless, she begged of him to pray to God for her, as she was with child, and generally endured great sufferings in that state.

"Pray," said she, "that I may obtain a happy delivery."

Benedict gave her the same answer that he had given Gaudentius: "I am obliged to do so."

Barbara never doubted for a moment that his prayers would be granted, and in fact, she was delivered almost without pain.

On the eve of his departure, Barbara did not forget to reiterate her request of the preceding year; she told him on his return the following Lent, to come immediately to her house. "If you do come," added she, "it will be a sign that our charity is acceptable to you, for you see that we treat you quite unceremoniously and as a poor man."

The next day, after having prayed a long time before the Madonna, Benedict returned to his lodging about noon, and took leave of his friends. Gaudentius again begged of him to come directly to his house the following year when he would return to Loreto. He then enquired of Benedict if he needed anything for his journey, and noticing that the staff he held in his hand was not very strong he offered him a better one that had been left at his house by another

traveler. The holy beggar accepted it, as well as a half-loaf of bread, then started on his journey.

After he left, Gaudentius and his wife gathered together, and put away most carefully every object they could find that the saint had made use of while under their roof.

"It is certain," said Barbara, "that one day these miserable objects will be of immense value, on account of the great holiness of the mendicant who touched them;" and she added in a tone of perfect conviction: "Oh! yes, he is a saint, for since he has been under our roof, our business has prospered to such an extent that Divine Providence has seemed to shower the choicest blessings upon us."

CHAPTER IX.

THE COLISEUM.—SAINT MARTIN'S HOSPITAL.

S we must remember, during the first years of Benedict's sojourn in Rome, he always passed the night in a small cave near the Quirinal, which was exposed to the inclemency of the weather. He soon left this miserable abode, and took up his dwelling in the Coliseum. He was undoubtedly drawn thither, because the stations of the cross were made there every week, and by the cross whose holy shadow guarded the vast arena. This sign of our salvation, has, since then, been ruthlessly pulled down by a sacrilegious band. Benedict was also attracted to the Coliseum by the remembrance of the glorious combats fought there for the true faith by legions of martyrs.

He could not have chosen a better place in which to pray and unite himself to God. The deepest solitude, and most complete loneliness reigned there. Not a sound broke the solemn silence of the night, save the cries of the screech-owl and other night birds; they were the real masters of the gigantic

ruins. No one ever disturbed them, unless it was an occasional visitor, who came for a moment to admire the wonderful effect of moonlight or torchlight playing among the crumbling arches. With the decline of day, this colossal monument wrapped itself up in a mantle of gloom, that appalls and repels intruders. Its strange windings, and decayed vaults, its ruined arcades, and the echo of dying footsteps inspire awe and fear.

It was in the midst of this great silence and complete darkness, that Benedict enjoyed unutterable peace and delight. When he had retired within the recesses of a delapidated wall, he forgot the world and kept his eyes fixed on God who was his father and friend, and to whom he confided the burning love that consumed his heart. Why should he have any fear in that lonely place? Was he not in company with the Lord and his angel guardian? Why should one be in dread who possess no earthly treasures, and considers this world as a land of exile?

Benedict often passed entire nights in profound meditation and sweet communion with God. Sunrise often found him in the same position where sunset had left him on the previous evening. During the long and weary hours of the night, the Lord, to reward his faithful servant for his intense sufferings, and sustain his debilitated system, must have granted him heavenly visions. He probably beheld one of those heroes, whose blood formerly reddened the dust of that vast arena. And, when looking upon the mar-

tyr's glorious wounds and the palm of victory, won at the price of martyrdom, he felt himself invited to greater works of penance.

However, there were moments when he struggled in vain against fatigue; the assistance that he expected from heaven came not, and his eyes, heavy with sleep, refused to remain fixed upon his God. Then, sad and disheartened, he would throw himself on a handful of straw, and most reluctantly give his body a few moments of repose.

But Benedict was some times disturbed in the solitude of these ruins. For the edification of the world, God permitted that occasionally a belated visitor, or persons waiting for the opening of neighboring churches, should see Benedict in his recess, or hear him recite his prayers aloud.

Father Gaston Reder, whom we have already mentioned in this narrative, had voluntarily bound himself to visit the deserted edifices of ancient Rome every evening about nightfall, for the express purpose of preventing disturbances, or saving some unfortunate person from committing a rash act. One evening, as he was walking through the long galleries of the Coliseum, he met Benedict Joseph, and was surprised at his modest and thoughtful appearance; at first he thought the beggar was some great sinner led to do penance for past iniquities. But he changed his opinion when, looking at him more attentively, he remembered having seen him in the grotto of Monte Cavallo. He concluded he was a really devout person, who was

attracted to the Coliseum, because it recalled the great triumph of the martyrs.

Some time later, about midwinter, a stranger who noticed Benedict's destitution, and grieved for his sufferings, gave him some alms, expressing at the same time, his surprise at such a way of living, and advised the pious mendicant to change his habits if he did not wish to be the cause of his own death. Father Reder happened to be passing at that moment, and he stopped, in order to listen to the conversation. "I feel grateful for your good advice," answered Benedict, "but I may not follow it, for I am now accomplishing God's will."

"But why," enquired the stranger, "do you not go to San Gallicano hospital?" On hearing this question Benedict bowed his head and was silent. Then, Father Reder fearing that, owing to the young man's silence, the stranger would form an unfavorable opinion of him, stepped forward and said: "I know this poor man, and vouch for his honesty. It is certainly not to avoid the hospital that he remains here, but rather, through a spirit of penance and religion."

From that day forward, Father Reder took great interest in Benedict, and he never spoke of him but as a saint who was destined to astonish the world by his great holiness.

We must not think however, that the holy beggar instinctively practiced virtue, or that he aspired to perfection without making a single effort. Neither should we imagine that the God who fills the corollas of

flowers with dew, also replenished Benedict Joseph's heart with generosity, and the love of all noble virtue, so that Benedict had only to open his heart to Divine Grace, in order to walk in the path of righteousness.

It has been truly said that there is no real holiness without combats. Benedict Joseph had to pray and struggle unceasingly in order to preserve the Grace of God. The tempter was incessantly trying to invade the sanctuary of his soul, and he made the most shameful suggestions in order to obtain the mastery over this holy young man.

Notwithstanding his mortifications and retirement, Benedict had to combat that sting of the flesh of which St. Paul speaks. Sometimes, when his soul soared heavenward, on the wings of faith, dangerous visions would pass through his mind and drag him back into the mire of sensuality. Although his senses were well controlled, and almost destroyed by fasting and penance, they would assert themselves with renewed strength, and a terrible abyss seemed to open at his feet. Benedict, alarmed and dismayed, would have recourse to God, and supplicate him most ardently to deliver him from such violent temptations. With tearful eyes, he declared he would rather die, than give consent to any of the passions that were raging within him. Whenever he was tormented in this manner, he always redoubled his prayers and mortifications, for he knew, that according to the word of Jesus Christ, these temptations could not be overcome except by fasting and prayer.

He was most cruelly tempted at night, when taking the few moment's repose he so much needed to recruit his feeble body.

The devil haunted his pillow of stone, and softly whispered in his ears words of worldly delight and sensuality; he first presented one, then another seductive and voluptuous scene before the holy youth's imagination. Who can tell the agony Benedict endured during these terrible moments? He rolled on the ground, blessed himself, struck his breast, and recalled to his mind the most painful scenes in the Passion of our Lord. But, with God's help, the devil was always vanquished; he never could obtain the slightest consent to the bad thoughts he suggested to Benedict Joseph, for, according to the evidence of all those who knew him, Benedict had preserved his baptismal robe pure and spotless.

God, true to his promise, thus rewarded the austere life of His servant; and, are not penance and mortifications the guardians and inseparable companions of our chastity?

Benedict Joseph continued to pass the night in the dwelling which he had chosen within the Coliseum, until the year 1779. His confessors, and among others Father Thomas Gabrini, who belonged to the order established by Saint Francis Caracciolo, advised him to change his mode of living, and not to sleep in the open air, or on the cold, bare ground. On several occasions, they told him it would be better if he entered some hospital like other poor persons who had

no homes. But, Benedict always begged them to allow him to remain as he was, saying, that if he suffered anything, it was very little in comparison to what he deserved; and he would add: "Is it not written that the Son of Man had not even a stone on which to rest His head?"

These words were uttered with so much faith that it was evident further remonstrance would be useless, and no one dared insist.

Still, in the month of June, 1779, Benedict was forced to exchange his poor cave for another residence. On returning from Loreto, he was exhausted and more dead than alive; his limbs had begun to swell so that he could scarcely drag himself along. Theodosius Grimaldi, who was a keeper at Saint Martin's hospital, and a man of great piety, had already formed a certain friendship for Benedict. Meeting him one day on the street in this pitiful condition, his heart was filled with compassion, and he offered him a place at Saint Martin's, saying that he himself would take care of him. Saint Martin's hospital was founded by the religious of the Church Santa Maria dei Monti, who were called *pious*, or else *evangelical* laborers. The duty of these pious men was to gather the poor in their church, and teach them the word of God. But, not satisfied with ministering to their spiritual necessities, they always distributed alms after the conclusion of the religious services. Moreover, as we have already said, they built a hospital a short distance from the church, where twelve poor persons

found shelter every night. Father Paul Mancini was superintendent of the hospital; formerly an apostolical prothonotary in the Court of Rome, he gave up his profession in order to devote himself entirely to good works.

Before accepting this kind offer, Benedict made inquiries concerning the regulations of the institution; for he feared being brought in contact with vulgar, quarrelsome patients, or being obliged to look upon something even slightly immodest within the wards. Theodosius relieved his mind of all anxiety on that point, and then presented his new friend to Father Mancini. This charitable clergyman had heard of the holy life led by Benedict, and did not hesitate to give him admission to the hospital.

Thanks to the good care given him by Theodosius, at the end of a month, Benedict was enabled to resume his pilgrimages to the different shrines of the city. He first intended to return to his abode in the Coliseum, but as he thought it would be tempting God to do so, he changed his mind. As he was satisfied with the discipline at the hospital, he begged to be allowed to sleep there at night.

Father Mancini demurred a few moments before granting his request, because it was not customary to lodge any one for an indefinite length of time. But as he appreciated the wonderful virtue of Benedict, and seemed to foresee what glory would one day redound to the hospital for having harbored such a holy man, he made an exception to the rule in his favor. This

worthy clergyman has said that subsequently he grew so enthusiastic over Benedict's eminent holiness and rare perfections, that he thought of obliging his successors to give the holy mendicant a bed until his death.

Benedict passed the remainder of his days at Saint Martin's hospital, and he was there, as he had been everywhere else, a model for all with whom he came in contact. He observed the regulations of the hospital with great attention, and was particularly careful to return in the evening at the fixed hour; and in order to do so, he would curtail his prayers and meditations at the foot of the altar. The doors were opened to the inmates at the close of the day, and remained so for a quarter of an hour.

Whenever Benedict happened to return before the doors were opened, he would enter the church Dei Monti, to join in the Litanies of the Blessed Virgin, which were recited there every day at sunset. If he reached the church too late to take part in that prayer, he would wait in a corner and say his beads.

In the hospital he was exceedingly obliging, and he performed all the duties imposed upon him by the rule, or exacted by the keeper. He very rarely took part in the conversations. During the long winter evenings, when the inmates gathered in groups and conversed together, Benedict remained beside his bed communing with God. Sometimes, however, he did take part in the conversation, especially when some religious subject was being discussed. Then his

face beamed with grace and beauty. He spoke very little, but his remarks were always sensible and accurate. Unfortunately, the conversation did not always turn upon religious topics,—it often consisted of rude and uncharitable remarks. Our drawing-rooms, where christian men and good women meet together, are not exempt from these scandals; so, how can poor and uneducated people—hardened by vice and misery—be expected to be inpeccable?

Benedict Joseph did not fear to severely condemn such conversations. "Bridle your tongues," he would say to them, "and think of the Passion of Our Lord." Such remonstrances were not always well received, and they often gave rise to jests and inuendoes which were directed against Benedict; he was termed a hypocrite, an ignorant man and a bigot. Benedict bore all in silence, and was happy to have something to suffer for the sake of his dear Savior.

One day, an inmate returned to the hospital in an intoxicated condition, and it was necessary to assist him in reaching his bed.

This incident created quite a sensation in that little world. "How could a man," said they with reason, "put himself on a level with dumb animals deprived of intelligence?" One remark followed another, until an inmate suddenly said: "Surely, it is better to be intoxicated than to be sick." "Are you a fool," enquired Benedict severely, "do you not know that drunkenness is a sin, whilst sickness is not?" The culprit, appreciating the truth of Benedict's words,

was silent, but one of his companions was indignant, and said that such a holy man as Benedict Joseph should not call his neighbors fools, but he who had been reprimanded, bravely defended the mendicant, and said he deserved reproof for having spoken so thoughtlessly.

As a rule, Benedict Joseph was greatly respected by his companions, and they admired his fervor, piety, and penitential spirit. In their eyes, he was a real oracle, and whenever they discussed questions of doctrine and could not agree, they always went to Benedict to have his opinion.

One evening, at St. Martin's, a question arose as to the merits and sad condition of the poor. Antonino Bartolotti, who was better educated than any of the others, said he was of the opinion that the poor, being deprived of everything, were exempt from the penances, fastings and other mortifications imposed by the Church on all the faithful. "What!" exclaimed Benedict, who was perhaps a little too severe on this occasion; "have not the poor bodies as well as others, that incline them to evil? And should they not subdue and mortify their bodies by privations and fastings?"

Another evening, this same Bartolotti, pretended that a small lie was not a sin, provided it was told in self-defence. Benedict interrupted him immediately and made him understand that a falsehood, no matter how small, was not excusable, even to save the whole world. A few days later, an incident occurred which

afforded Benedict Joseph an occasion to practice what he had just taught. Antonino Bartolotti, was sometimes employed during the day in a pharmacy. He often ran on errands for the ladies in the neighborhood. One evening, after he had returned very much more fatigued than usual after his day's work, he heard some one calling him. He did not wish to answer, so he told his neighbor to say he had not yet returned.

When Benedict heard this, he hastened to a window, opened it, and said that Antonino had returned home, but did not wish to be disturbed. Then, turning towards his companion, he said: "You forgot that we are not allowed to tell falsehoods, and that we should speak the truth, let come what may."

The Church had enemies then as now, who did their utmost to oppose Her influence, and who worked indefatigably to deprive Her of the place which God had given Her in the world. Consequently, every one speculated as to what would be the result of all those dissensions, and even in Saint Martin's they discussed the actions of the enemies of the Church. Some thought the Church was too patient in regard to her persecutors, and that she should excommunicate all those who worked against her. Benedict hastened to tell them that from the moment a person commits an offense against the Church, he is excommunicated, whether it is proclaimed by the Church or not. On another occasion they were speaking of the earthquakes which devastated Cala-

bria and Sicily, and congratulated themselves upon residing in the holy city of Rome, which was naturally protected from all afflictions. Benedict said: "No matter where we may be, or whither we may go, we cannot escape the vengeance of heaven if we continue to offend God. You will not be saved because you live in Rome. We are continually punished, still we never cease committing sin." Benedict's prophesy was fully realized, and at the present hour, the hand of God weighs heavily on Rome itself. With sorrow and consternation, we look upon the abyss that its crimes and misdeeds are daily opening at its feet. Sound sense, righteousness and justice are drifting in the same direction as that taken by finance; everything is going to ruin, and no one thinks of appeasing the anger of God.

Benedict's lessons always made a deep impression on the inmates of Saint Martin's hospital, for they well knew, he was the first to practice what he taught others, and that his only object in view was the glory of God, and the good of his fellow men. Besides, they feared to offend him by not following his advice, and this very fear converted the most hardened among them. There are numerous instances related of Benedict's sojourn in the hospital and his influence over those with whom he resided.

One day, a person complained of having been robbed, and declared that if he discovered the thief, he would make an example of him. For a whole week he uttered threats and severe invectives against the un-

known purloiner. Just about this time, a *triduum* of prayers opened in the hospital, in honor of some special feast.

The person who had been longing for vengeance, was the first to mention that it was necessary to prepare themselves to gain the indulgences. Without addressing him in particular, Benedict reminded the bystanders that to gain the indulgences, it was not only necessary to recite all the prayers prescribed by the Church, but that the sentiments of the heart must be good, and the pardon of injuries the touchstone of those sentiments. The vindictive man understood the lesson so delicately given, and hastened to profit by it.

Benedict Joseph endeavored by every means in his power, to do good to his fellow men, and he would not cease until he had succeeded in making them better. To obtain this end, he would sometimes use sharp words, or expressions of the greatest charity, as the case required; but under all circumstances, his face retained that sweet expression of kindness peculiar to it. Only once did he assume a severe and terrible look. We know Benedict could not tolerate the least thing said, that might offend the virtue of purity—the virtue he loved the best. One day, Theodosius, the keeper of the hospital, unguardedly dropped an immodest word, and those who heard it laughed. Benedict was filled with holy anguish, and his eyes seemed to flash fire as he said: "What do you mean by speaking in this manner? Have you no shame?" Theodosius bowed

his head, and acknowledged that he was guilty and deserved the reproach.

Zeal for God's glory has never been an obstacle to christian charity. On the contrary, those who possess the greatest love for their heavenly father, are most devoted to their fellow men. Has not Our Savior said: "*By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" That is why Benedict Joseph, who was so eager for God's glory—was so devoted to the welfare of his brethren. If one happened to be sick, he was untiring in his efforts to care for him. If he kept anything from the alms he had received in the course of the day, a morsel of bread or a piece of money, he gave it to his friends.

One winter night, a new boarder had just arrived at Saint Martin's. He was shoeless, and his feet and limbs were covered with sores. Benedict offered him his best shoes, and as the new comer hesitated to accept them through fear of never being able to pay their value, Benedict assured him that he never sold anything, that when he disposed of an object, he always gave it away.

He even gave more than was asked of him. A companion asked him for a small piece of linen, and Benedict gave him an whole garment. The poor man did not wish to accept such a gift and was about to cut a piece from it, when Benedict stopped him and said: "It is not worth while cutting it; keep it entire and use it."

The holy youth was exceedingly happy whenever

he could be useful or agreeable to his companions. Nothing annoyed or disturbed him, provided his friends were pleased and at their ease. He put himself out in every way to oblige his neighbors.

One day, the warden of the hospital gave orders to have all the old straw in the beds burned. Benedict refused to execute this order, for he had noticed that the neighbors, annoyed by the smoke, were angry and that they grumbled. Antonino, who had charge of the work, was surprised at his resistance, and mentioned it. "Do you not see," answered Benedict "that this command causes us to offend God? It is better to avoid obedience, especially when that obedience has in view our own comfort, than to be the cause of blasphemy."

His room was situated near a staircase in a passage that led to a large hall occupied by the other inmates. He never retired until late into the night, and long after the lights were extinguished. His companions never saw him dress or undress. No matter how early they arose, Benedict was up before them. He took but little rest, and that, without undressing, leaning rather than lying in his bed. It happened one day, that those who occupied the large hall, complained that one among them, was unbearable, owing to the infection exhaled from his person. The keeper placed the unfortunate patient in Benedict's room, who did not complain or even seem to notice the serious inconvenience his room-mate caused him.

The keepers had orders to see that the rule was

observed to the letter, and to report to Father Mancini any violation by the inmates of the house. Theodosius was very good-natured, often overlooking offences that a strict disciplinarian would have severely reprimanded.

Benedict suffered greatly from Theodosius' weakness of character, for he was despised and laughed at by malicious men, in the presence of this keeper, who was always silent.

On some occasions however, he went to the other extreme, and reported things which made him appear extremely ridiculous. For instance, Benedict often repeated during the night, in a low tone of voice: "Have mercy on me, O Lord have mercy on me;" or else: "O good God, O good God." The good keeper, who understood neither Latin nor French, and fearing that Benedict Joseph, whom nevertheless, he greatly respected and admired, was acting in opposition to the discipline of the house, hastened to inform Father Mancini of what took place. "Do not fear," said Father Mancini, smiling, "leave him alone, for he can say nothing better than that." Every night, as is customary in every truly christian house, prayers were said in common. The inmates gathered around a little altar that was in the large hall, and the keeper said prayers, while the others answered. This pious exercise consisted in the beads, the litanies of the Blessed Virgin, and seven *Paters* and *Aves* in honor of the Saints, and finally, these words, first recited by the keeper, then repeated by the assistants: "Eternal

praise and thanksgiving be given to the most Holy and adorable Sacrament of the Altar."

Benedict, who remained kneeling, immovable, the whole time of the prayer, with his eyes modestly cast down, answered with angelical fervor. His voice became louder and firmer during the recital of the litanies, and assumed an accent that the inmates of Saint Martin's well understood.

His burning love for the Mother of God, was apparent in the clear ring of his voice, and the bright glow on his cheek. But, when it was time to praise Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, he was silent ; at the very mention of the Eucharist, his brave heart failed him, he was no longer master of his senses, and his voice refused to join those of his companions.

Prayers lasted about half an hour. After that, Benedict would retire to his room, and continue to meditate until late into the night.

In 1781, the good-natured Theodosius died a holy death ; and Father Mancini choose as his successor a certain Leopold Clarelli, who was a straight-forward, firm, and even severe man. Leopold was more successful than his predecessor, in maintaining order in the little community.

From the very beginning, Leopold remarked the influence that Benedict exercised over all those around, and it annoyed him. He felt an unaccountable antipathy for the poor young man ; he did not approve of his reserve, and feared he would assume a superior standing among his companions.

The keeper often manifested his dislike for Benedict, by his stinging words and disagreeable manner. He continually tried the holy youth's patience; he crowded work upon him; treated him harshly—saying that he was no better than the others, and consequently, must accomplish as much as they. Benedict was victorious, for he obeyed like a child, promptly and cheerfully. Leopold was won by Benedict's meekness, and his prejudice disappeared; he acknowledged he had under his control a man possessing extraordinary qualities, and he afterwards showed the greatest friendship for him.

If, when the doors were opened, Benedict had not arrived, he would call his name, and go in search of him. He enjoyed his conversation, and considered him as an oracle; he particularly enjoyed watching him during prayer, and he said that to behold Benedict, was sufficient to incite one to love of God and prayer.

During the recital of the beads, the inmates of the hospital were permitted to be seated, but Benedict never made use of this permission. Leopold had requested him to sit down a number of times, but in vain. One evening, when he seemed to be weaker than usual, the keeper obliged him to take a seat through obedience. Benedict sat down immediately, but in a few moments resumed his kneeling position.

It was not long before Leopold remarked the wonderful changes that took place in Benedict when the prayer in honor of the Blessed Sacrament was recited.

Instead of answering with the others, the mendicant would raise his eyes to heaven, cross his arms on his breast, then let his head fall on a *prie Dieu* near at hand.

Notwithstanding the affection that Leopold bore Benedict, he thought it necessary to chide him. The latter did not try to excuse himself, nor did his conduct change. Leopold who was aware of his fervor and obedience, examined him more closely, and became convinced that the strength of his love prevented him from answering with his companions, and that at the very name of the Blessed Sacrament, his love was so great that he would lose entire control of his senses and voice.

All these circumstances, united with Benedict's way of living, his modesty, obedience and piety, had a powerful influence over Leopold, who redoubled his attention and respect, and endeavored by every means in his power, to make him forget his former harshness. Being perfectly convinced of the mendicant's great holiness, he passed all his spare moments in his company, so as to edify himself by his great virtue.

Thus it was that, by degrees, the pilgrim of Amette formed new family ties, and made those numerous friends, who were so devoted and so much attached to him.

CHAPTER X.

THE MENDICANT'S COURT.

faithful friend, is the medicine of life and immortality, and they that fear the Lord shall find him." Benedict Joseph had found many friends. We have already mentioned the Sori family, Father Gaspard, George Zitli, and Leopold Clavelli. At Rome, at Loreto—wherever he went—he formed a little circle of friends who loved and respected him. Most of these friends, were of humble station in life—among them were holy priests, pious women, and poor mechanics. Their relations with Benedict did not in the least resemble worldly friendship. They associated with the mendicant for the purpose of relieving his poverty, hoping at the same time to incite themselves to the practice of virtue, by the example of his regular and devout life.

Yet, as we have seen, everything about Benedict Joseph was repulsive—his unkempt hair and beard; his ragged shirt, always open at the breast; the wooden cup that hung from the cord he wore around his waist; his half naked limbs; his feet which were scarcely covered by his worn-out shoes; and above all, the swarm

of insects that infested his person — all these things were not of a nature to inspire sentiments of affection. But Benedict was one of those privileged souls to whom the Holy Scripture has promised the sweet boon of friendship. Besides, rays of light seemed to emanate from the wretched clothing that covered him, and these rays proved him to be a saint, even to the eyes of the most obtuse. His polite and amiable manners; his face from which beamed the joy and peace that filled his soul; his modest and quiet deportment; all spoke in his favor, as soon as the unfavorable impression produced by the first glance at the holy youth, had passed away.

Two priests, belonging to Santa Maria dei Monti, Father Melis, and Father Fraja, experienced the effect of this charm. Father Melis said mass daily at Santa Maria dei Monti, and this, as has been said, was Benedict's favorite church. It was not long before Father Melis noticed the pious beggar who always knelt at the Epistle side of the altar; his piety, his humility, and poverty, affected the good old priest to tears. Seeing him so poorly clad, he would have liked to give him alms, but did not dare interrupt the youth's prayers, and so contented himself with placing a piece of money on the railing near Benedict, who, without speaking a word, expressed his thanks by a grateful look and an inclination of the head. Only seeing Benedict every morning at church, and offering him alms, caused the worthy priest to become very much attached to him. One day, meet-

ing him in the street, he made bold, and spoke to him, saying: "The hat you have on your head is no longer fit to wear." In fact it was not, for Benedict Joseph could scarcely keep it on his head, owing to its ragged condition. "I wish to give you the one I am wearing," continued Father Melis. "It is too good for me," replied Benedict. "You are mistaken," said the priest, "it is old, and I can no longer wear it. Call at my house and I will give it to you."

But, having waited in vain for Benedict to call for the hat, he finally took it to church one morning, and placed it beside the youth. Benedict hastened to put holes in it, for fear it might be too good for a beggar.

Father Melis would gladly have taken Benedict to his house, and surrounded him with every care and attention, but for an old servant who chose to take an extreme dislike to Benedict and his shabby garments. But Father Melis invited Benedict to take dinner with him, and the day he expected him, was a real holiday for the good old priest.

As the hour of noon drew near, Father Melis awaited his guest with as much impatience as if the latter had been a prince. The table was laid and everything was very neat, but extremely plain, for the good priest knew that Benedict Joseph would be offended with anything like luxury. As the hours went by without bringing the guest, Father Melis began to grow so uneasy that he could not remain away from the window. He feared that notwithstanding the explicit directions he had given Benedict, the latter might not be able to find the

house, or else, that absorbed in meditation, he would pass it by. The clock had already struck twelve, and the honored guest so impatiently expected, had not yet arrived. Father Melis began to be at loss to account for Benedict's delay, when he suddenly saw him turn a corner of the street and approach his house, but as he expected, the holy youth was thinking only of heavenly things, and passed by the door. Father Melis hastened to call him, and the holy servant of God retraced his footsteps.

Seated at table beside Benedict, the good priest could scarcely restrain his joy. He helped him to what was on the table, as though he had been serving Jesus Christ himself. Benedict smiled at the kindness of his venerable host, and tasted a little, "a very little," says the Father, of everything offered him, through a spirit of obedience.

In later years, when Father Melis recalled the past, he dwelt with delight on the day when Benedict had been his guest, and praised it almost as highly as the day of his first communion—and was it not in fact, the same God whom he received, first in the Blessed Sacrament, and later in the person of a poor man?

Father Fraja, an old Spanish priest, was not so delicate, or rather so polite towards Benedict, as was Father Melis. He was very frank and plain spoken, very determined, and sometimes a little rough. Although he loved and respected the holy mendicant fully as much as did Father Melis, he sometimes treated him sternly. For instance, he would command

him to accept the alms that he offered him. In this way, he forced him to accept, now a hat, and again a pair of shoes, or some other article of dress.

One day, he took Benedict to his house, in order to give him a garment of which the latter stood very much in need. On receiving it, Benedict showed so much gratitude to God, and thanked Him so piously for coming to His poor servant's assistance on this occasion, that the good old priest, greatly edified, and following the impulse of his warm southern nature, threw himself at Benedict's feet and kissed them. Benedict was terrified at this unexpected mark of esteem, and consternation and confusion overspread his countenance. He gave vent to his grief in sobs and tears. Fraja endeavored to console him, by saying that his homage had been intended for Jesus Christ, whom the poor man represented. But even this assurance did not wholly quiet Benedict's scruples. He even seemed to retain some resentment of the action of the good priest, and avoided him with the greatest care. But Fraja was not offended by Benedict's reserve; he remained as generous and as affectionate as ever towards his young friend. In 1782, winter set in very early at Rome and was more rigorous than usual. One very cold day, Father Fraja met Benedict in the street. As the latter's mantle scarcely sufficed to cover him, his breast and limbs were exposed to the bitter blast; the priest offered him a warm wrapper of swan skin, and besought him to call at his house and receive it.

As Benedict had an excellent memory, and feared a repetition of the scene which had scandalized him so much, he asked: "What is the color of your garment?" "It is black," answered the Father. "Then, it would not do, for I should be taken for a priest." "But will you not at least accept a woolen waistcoat?" pleaded Father Fraja. "I do not need it," answered Benedict, and he cut the conversation short, for it annoyed him. We could cite a number of Benedict's friends, who saw him constantly at Santa Maria dei Monti, and among others, the pious young girl, Mary Poeti, whom we have already mentioned, and who saw Benedict surrounded by supernatural light. As early as the year 1775, Mary Poeti had spoken of the holy beggar to her mother, and the two pious women undertook to make a study of his beautiful life. They were among the few who understood Benedict's feelings, and not knowing his name, called him Saint Alexius. Benedict Joseph seemed to feel a special attraction towards these two holy women, and spoke to them occasionally on the street, or at the church door. Wishing to live as a beggar in the strictest sense of the word, he had resolved never to dine out; still he accepted an invitation to dinner from these good women, and deigned to sit down at their table, and share their frugal repast. As we have said, Benedict also visited the church of Saint Praxides, in which is preserved the column of the Flagellation. It was in the chapel of La Colonna Santa, that Benedict met Cremaschi, who was employed in a bank, and who was

a simple, upright, christian man. The strongest ties of affection bound him to Benedict.

Notwithstanding the latter's unprepossessing appearance, Cremaschi did not fail to perceive that he had a soul of extraordinary beauty.

Deeply touched by Benedict's wonderful piety, the former never wearied watching him when rapt in contemplation, in an angle of the chapel. It seemed to him that he beheld an adoring angel. After leaving the church, Cremaschi cherished the thoughts of what he had seen, and constantly returned in spirit to the church of Saint Praxides. It made him happy to think that, on the following Sunday, he should enjoy the privilege of once more beholding his dear mendicant. And he was not deceived, for Benedict was there, and Cremaschi's admiration changed to enthusiasm. He was convinced that God had permitted him to look upon a great saint, and he immediately formed the resolution to make his acquaintance. But, he did not know how to accomplish this, and spent the entire week in planning some way to the accomplishment of his project.

He had never dared speak to Benedict, being restrained by a certain respect with which the mendicant inspired all strangers. But, he resolved to make more bold in the future, and when alone he studied the sentence he should employ when addressing him.

The following Sunday, Cremaschi went to Saint Praxides, fully determined to speak to the pious youth. But, alas! Benedict did not appear. What had be-

come of him? Where should he find him? Cremaschi commenced to seek him, and at the end of a month, met him one evening in the church of Santa Maria. Rallying his courage, he stationed himself at the church door, to await Benedict. He had not to wait long to see the youth leave the church. So great was his pallor and debility, that Cremaschi fancied he saw Jesus Christ himself leaving the prætorium. He approached him timidly, and without stopping him, enquired his name and place of residence. Benedict answered briefly, and continued walking. Cremaschi followed him, continuing his questions, to which Benedict Joseph either did not reply at all, or else answered in monosyllables. Cremaschi finally invited him to his house, situated near Santa Maria dei Miracoli, in the Piazza del Popolo, where he would give him some wearing apparel. He had to reiterate his invitation, and repeat his address. Finally, he offered his card to Benedict who accepted it, and simply said: "Very well." "I cannot express," said Cremaschi on this subject, "the pleasure and joy these simple words gave me. I had attained my end, which was to attract him to my home, so that my house might be honored by the presence of a Christian hero who, in my eyes, was one of the greatest I could imagine in this world."

Days grew into weeks, and still Cremaschi did not see Benedict. At Christmas, however, he met him in the church of Santa Maria. He quickly approached him, and begged him to accept the invitation to call at his house. "I will go," said Benedict. These

words were sufficient to awaken in Cremaschi's heart the same feelings of joy that he had already experienced when this ragged beggar first gave him his promise. Instead of going directly to his place of business, Cremaschi returned home in order to tell his sisters to prepare the wearing apparel that he had promised Benedict. But it was not till January, 1781, almost one year later, about the feast of the Epiphany, that Benedict knocked at Cremaschi's door. The latter happened to be at table, but he quickly arose and went to meet him; he then presented him to his family, and invited him to be seated. He showed him the greatest marks of respect and affection. This affection was sincere, for never did Cremaschi speak of Benedict to his friends, or at the process, without mentioning him as il Signore Benedetto.

Cremaschi's sisters, who were not so enthusiastic about Benedict as their brother, surrounded him, and asked innumerable questions. In order to save Benedict from their importunity, Cremaschi gave him the garments he had prepared, then, to prove how much he honored him, accompanied him as far as the street door. He felt tempted to cut a piece from his mantle, but was restrained by motives of delicacy. Later, however, he reproached himself for not having done so. Benedict, who remarked Cremaschi's great admiration for his poor person, endeavored ever after to avoid him. On the other hand, Cremaschi thought of nothing else but his dear mendicant; and would go purposely to La Santa Colonna, or to Santa Maria,

in the hope of meeting him. His greatest happiness, was to behold his Saint Francis of Assisi, il Signore Benedetto.

It would take too long to enumerate the list of Benedict's other friends, of all those who, pitying his destitute condition, endeavored in a thousand different ways, to prevail on him to accept covering in winter, or a shelter from the burning sun in summer. They were mostly humble people, and prominent among them were: Nick, a shoemaker, who had formerly been a soldier in the Swiss Guard of the Pope; Peter Giansamini, a clerk in the vestry of the church of the Holy Apostles; the Gardellini Sisters, two pious young girls devoted to good works, but especially to the teaching of catechism. All these watched for a favorable opportunity to slip a piece of money into his hand, and were happy whenever he spoke a word to them.

But Francis Zaccarelli, a poor mechanic, was on a more familiar and friendly footing with Benedict than any of the others, and it was undoubtedly to reward his devotedness to Benedict and his zeal in publicly praising the mendicant's virtues, that the Lord permitted His pious servant to receive the former's hospitality in his dying moments, and breathe his last sigh under his roof. Francis Zaccarelli lived in the neighborhood of Santa Maria dei Monti, on Dei Serpenti street, opposite the quarters of the Corsican soldiers. He was a truly Christian man, practicing his religion most scrupulously, but without ostentation. His home was

a sanctuary where prayer and work went hand in hand. Francis Zaccarelli, his wife Catherine Santini, his daughter Ann, and his two sons, Fortune and Peter Paul, heard mass every morning in the church of Santa Maria dei Monti; the father approached the sacraments every Saturday, after which, he remained in the church, a good portion of the forenoon. Consequently, since the year 1775, when the holy beggar first appeared at Santa Maria dei Monti, Zaccarelli had had every opportunity to observe him, and did not fail to do so. The pious demeanor of this beggar, his fervent prayers, and the length of his visits to the church, made a deep impression on Zaccarelli.

He saw him in the morning, assisting at mass, and in the evening, taking part in the recital of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin; he never tired contemplating that face which was suffused with the glow of burning love, and bore the impress of perfect peace. Contemplating him, he felt something of the holy joy experienced by the disciples of Emmaus, when they conversed with Christ after His resurrection. And several times, especially when mass was of obligation, this contemplation, and the consolation it gave him, caused him to have scruples. He doubted having fulfilled the precepts of the Church, and often felt obliged to hear a second mass.

Ann, his wife, and their son Fortune, shared Zaccarelli's admiration for Benedict, and little by little, they showed him the greatest marks of affection. Peter Paul, Zaccarelli's second son, was the only one

who did not pay much attention to Benedict, and he even thought that his parents were a little credulous in their infatuation for an unknown beggar, who would sooner or later deceive them. A singular occurrence suddenly changed his opinion, and caused him to share the feelings of the rest of the family.

One day, it was toward the end of the year 1781, Peter Paul entered the church of Santa Maria dei Monti. Benedict was in his accustomed place. Peter Paul who recognized him, cast a passing glance upon him; then, after having recited a few short prayers, went out, leaving Benedict Joseph in adoration before the altar. Peter Paul wended his way toward the church of S. Nicolo, in which was being observed the devotion of the forty hours. Following the most direct route, and without going out of his way, or stopping at any place, he soon traveled the long distance from Santa Maria dei Monti to S. Nicolo. On entering the church, what was his astonishment to see Benedict there before him, and already rapt in contemplation! He could not believe his eyes, and he asked himself how it had been possible for this weak and exhausted man, to reach the church before him, especially when he himself was full of life and strength. He said a short prayer as best he could, then left the church, anxious to have the mystery explained. He waited until Benedict appeared at the church door, and asked how it all happened. It was useless, for Benedict would not answer, but his silence did not discourage Peter Paul. He spoke to him of his father,

and asked the mendicant if a very long time had elapsed since he had seen him. On hearing these questions, Benedict raised his eyes and answered: "Yesterday." He then continued his way in silence without noticing Zaccarelli. They both walked in the direction of the Thermimæ Dicletian and Santa Maria Maggiore. Suddenly, they found themselves face to face with a drove of oxen. Peter Paul was acquainted with the owner of these cattle, and he warned his companion not to venture too near, as some of the animals were very dangerous. He gave an example of prudence, by leaning up against a wall. Benedict did not seem to heed the warning, for he quietly pursued his way, and to the amazement of Zaccarelli, the animals ranged themselves on either side so as to leave him a free passage. Peter Paul soon rejoined Benedict whom he questioned closely as to the remarkable event, but to no avail, for the latter was either silent, or made signs with his head or shoulders.

"But, I saw you," persisted Zaccarelli, "and I left you at Santa Maria dei Monti; you walk slowly, while I walk briskly, and still, you reached Santa Nicolo before me. How did it happen, and which direction did you take?" Benedict never answered a word. Zaccarelli knew that he was an unwelcome companion to the mendicant, but he could not tear himself away from him—he seemed to be under a spell. They both entered Santa Maria Maggiore together, and then, took a street that led to the monastery of Santa Lucia in Selce. Benedict continued to

walk in silence and meditation. Suddenly, he heard a little girl singing a song that was very unbecoming in a child of her years. Benedict called out to her, probably in order to check her singing, then turning to Zaccarelli, he said: "You heard what she sang, and perhaps she does not know her *Pater*." Zaccarelli finally made up his mind to part with his pious companion. Conscious that he had importuned him, he offered him some money, and softly recommended himself to his fervent prayers.

As was the case with most of Benedict's friends and admirers, the Zaccarellis were a long time before externally manifesting their friendship for him; a certain fear mingled with respect, held them back. The father was the first to make advances; he would kneel beside Benedict, and slip into his hand, or place in his hat, his humble offering. Benedict would accept it without uttering a word, and sometimes, without even turning his head. Zaccarelli delighted, felt his timidity gradually disappear, and one day, he made bold enough to stop Benedict as he was leaving the church, call him by his name, and give him a small sum of money.

The Zaccarelli family spoke of nothing else among themselves, but of the beggar of Santa Maria dei Monti. They supposed him to be a young nobleman who had given up his fortune, the pleasures, and comforts, of this life, to practice poverty in the truest sense of the word; they praised his modesty, and his excessive penance; they hoped he would pray for them, and they made a thousand plans to speak to him and

recommend to the holy youth the interests of the family. Even among their neighbors, their only conversation was about him. "Do you wish to see a saint," one day, asked Francis Zaccarelli, of one of his friends. "Well then, look at this beggar coming towards us."

Zaccarelli's wife was particularly desirous to attract him to her house, and then invite him to dinner. "You will not succeed," her husband told her. Nevertheless, she was determined to attempt it; therefore, meeting him one morning at Santa Maria dei Monti, she whispered her invitation in his ear. Benedict excused himself, saying he did not know where she lived, and when she gave him the requisite directions, he was silent. The good woman supposed this silence meant that Benedict had accepted her invitation, and thought she had gained her point, but she was mistaken.

Sometime later, meeting the saint in Santa Maria dei Monti, she hurriedly told him that she would send her son to bring him to dinner. "Dinner!" said Benedict, energetically, "dinner; I dine in the street." And then, he resumed his prayer.

These blunt words did not discourage the Zaccarelli family; they thought the refusal proceeded from the fact that the invitation had been given by a woman, so Francis Zaccarelli decided to speak to Benedict himself. He met him one day in his own street, and approaching, asked him where he came from, and why he looked so weary. "I come from Santa Maria in Transterere," said Benedict.

"From Santa Maria?" replied Zaccarelli; "yes," answered Benedict. "Then," said the good man, "you must be very tired, and in need of a little rest and nourishment; come to my house, and share our repast with us." Benedict refused, repeating what he had already said, that he always dined in the street; he then took leave of his charitable friend.

Friendly relations were nevertheless established between them, but they were not as intimate as the pious family would have desired. An unexpected event occurred however, the illness of Fortune, Zaccarelli's eldest son, which strengthened the link that bound Benedict to this charitable family. Although Fortune lodged with his parents, he kept a butcher's stall at a short distance from the house; he saw the holy beggar pass his stall every day, and often at Ara Coeli, at San Casimato, and at Santi Apostoli. He had admired his fervor and devout attitude before the Blessed Sacrament. Finding himself dangerously ill, he expressed the desire to see Benedict. One day, his sister Ann, seeing the beggar pass, quickly ran out on the street and requested him to call and see her sick brother. It was the 27th of February, 1782, the very day that Pius VI. started on his journey to Austria. Benedict did not refuse to perform this act of charity. When he had reached the sick room, he approached the bed with downcast eyes, and his arms folded on his breast. He exhorted the patient to be resigned to God's will, then exchanged a few rapid words with the family. Fortune asked the mendicant

if he had gone that morning to see the Holy Father depart. "What good would it have done?" asked Benedict, "it is far better to pray for him."

A few days subsequent to this visit, Benedict stopped in front of Fortune's stall, and told him he was about to start for Loreto; at the same time he begged of him to give him a pair of old shoes. Zaccarelli would have been happy to give him a new pair, but supposing they would not be accepted, he offered to conduct him to a second-hand store. Benedict would not listen to this, and he certainly would have left the place, had Zaccarelli not given him a pair of old shoes he happened to have in the house.

Benedict chose the worst pair. After having furnished him with shoes, Zaccarelli wished to give him a hat also. He took an old felt hat covered with oil-cloth; and after eloquently representing how little it was worth, he prevailed on Benedict to accept it. The holy beggar placed it on his head in a ridiculous manner, and a sweet smile brightened his emaciated face. Turning to Zacarelli, he said: "See, do I not look like a lord?"

CHAPTER XI.

OMNIS GLORIA AB INTUS. ALL HIS BEAUTY WAS WITHIN.

N the month of September, 1875, when my friends and I arrived at Rome, our first thought was to go to Saint Peter's, hoping to find the doors open. But we had scarcely reached the middle of the Colonnade, and had barely passed the obelisk of Sixtus V., when we heard the Ave Maria ringing, and knew it was too late. Still, we remained there, our eyes fixed on the immense Cathedral. The weather was magnificent; the stars were beginning to appear in the blue sky, and the cross glittered under the rays of the moon shining in the horizon—it was an enchanting scene. Our imagination penetrated the thick façade that hid from our view the interior splendors; and, as we stood there, we tried to conceive and compose this poem of stone, created by the genius of man in honor of the Lord—the first page was before our eyes. Those were moments of peaceful joy for us. But when, on the following day, with trembling hand we raised the heavy curtain, and entered the sacred edifice, we were dazzled and overwhelmed by so much

grandeur and majesty. In that immense nave, there were but the golden lamps burning before the confessional, a few pious women kneeling before the statue of Saint Peter, and ourselves. A subdued light fell upon the marble, the paintings, the statues, and the whole edifice. The cupola was magnificent in the sunlight and seemed to ascend toward Heaven like the prayer of the Just.

We now understood that our dream of the previous evening, was but a pale shadow compared with the reality which arose before us in all its glory.

This episode of my journey to Italy, naturally presented itself to my mind and my pen, when I wished to speak of the holy beggar's soul.

Benedict's body, for which he had so little regard, was the thick veil that hid his soul from our view, and our imagination seemed the only means within our grasp that might enable us to study it. But Benedict Joseph came to our assistance.

Did he not, in fact, by his penance, sufferings and mortifications, rend the veil of his flesh, affording us a glimpse into the sanctuary of his heart? The more he lacerated his body, the more visible became his soul.

We know that all we may say of the beauty of Benedict's soul, would be but a poor shadow of the reality; for God alone, by enlightening our own vision, as He will do in the bright regions of eternity, can show us those marvels in all their wondrous splendor. Still, no matter how imperfect may be the

pages which we will write, they shall be written with love. A holy soul is beautiful to behold, even through the veil of the body that envelopes it, and is well calculated to stimulate our courage, often shaken by struggles of life, and to console us for all the misery, shame and ignominy that this poor century, and especially the present day, has caused us. It will be but a dream,—a sweet and consoling dream. The reality will appear to us on the last day, when the Sun of Justice shall shine on the world, clothing the saints in light and glory.

"Benedict Joseph Labre," says Father Temple, who knew and appreciated him better than any one else, since he made a special study of his soul, "Benedict Joseph Labre, was one of those privileged souls, in which God takes delight; he was singularly endowed with the richest blessings; he was a marvel of holiness, entirely unknown to the world, and known to God alone. He was a Seraphim of love, living in and for Jesus Christ, and destined to once more prove the truth of the promises made, for the critical age in which we live. He was intended by God to detatch men from the vanities of the world, and by his example, invite them to penance, and love of the supreme good, because, although he lived in the world, he was like an angel of the earth, or rather an exile from heaven."

The most striking characteristic of his soul, was love of Jesus—of Jesus crucified. Our Lord's sufferings on Mount Calvary, were ever present to his

mind, and his heart bled for the innocent Lamb sacrificed in expiation of the sins of mankind.

He never passed a day without meditating on the sacred wounds of his Savior, and all his prayers and meditations led him irresistibly to the Passion of Jesus Christ. Prostrated on both knees before the crib of the Holy Infant, it seemed to him he saw his Jesus stretched upon the cross, His head crowned with thorns, His face disfigured, bruised and bloody, His feet and hands pierced with nails. "The very thought of the degradation and humiliation to which our Divine Lord was subjected, filled him with the greatest grief," says Father Temple. "He wept over his Well-beloved, with as much sorrow as a mother weeps over a son put to death before her eyes. His compassion was so deep and heart-felt," continues Father Temple, "that he could not suffer more, had he been nailed to the cross himself."

Benedict's heart being filled with this love, he naturally sought those churches in Rome which possessed some great relic of the Passion. Nearly every day he ascended the Scala Santa, endeavoring to find some trace of his Savior on which to press his burning lips. At the Church of Saint Praxides, he venerated the column of the Flagellation; in the basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, he adored the sacred wood of the true cross, and the nails which pierced the hands and feet of our Divine Master; at Saint Peter's, it was the lance of Saint Longinus that received the homage of this servant of God.

But the Coliseum was the favorite retreat of Benedict Joseph. There he meditated without interruption on the Passion of Christ, and always assisted at the Stations of the Cross. He generally prepared himself for this pious exercise by long meditations. He followed the Stations with such extreme sorrow, that he seemed transfigured. One day, he was remarked by a monk, who said, he closely resembled our Lord carrying His cross.

When the holy devotions were over, he redoubled his mortifications. Like Saint Paul, he felt the necessity of renewing in his flesh the Passion of Jesus Christ, and spurred himself on to further austerities.

But what caused this ardent soul its keenest anguish was the thought of the scandals of the world, and the indifference of man, which seemed to echo the vociferations of the Jews during the Passion and death of Christ. He grieved to think of the hatred of the world for Jesus dying on the Cross to redeem mankind. This thought tortured him. And to appease the anger of God so justly aroused, he suffered every pain and bore every cross.

According to the evidence of Father Temple, he sighed for martyrdom, and offered himself to God as a living victim. He wished to die for Christ in order to engrave the love of God upon the hearts of men.

It has been justly said that a person who has unbounded love for another, will imitate most closely the object of his affection. That is why Benedict

Joseph, whose soul was overflowing with love for his crucified Savior, endeavored to reproduce in his body the sufferings of his Well-beloved; he was the representation of Jesus insulted and reviled.

In the last weeks of his life—during Lent, 1783—it was impossible to prevent him from drinking vinegar; he enjoyed taking the same bitter draught given to Jesus nailed to the cross.

The imitation of Christ crucified, made its impression on the person and features of Benedict. At first his resemblance to Jesus lay in his physiognomy and his expression of sorrow; the prominence of his forehead prevented all plastic resemblance. But love gradually softened the Gallic harshness of form, and during the last years of his life, his head resembled the traditional type of the God-Man. Under the rays of his warm and passionate love, as under the rays of a quickening sun, a thousand virtues grew as so many flowers, in his holy soul; the principal ones being humility, obedience, resignation, chastity, and the spirit of prayer. Benedict Joseph had given up the things of this world, he even took the greatest care to hide his name, but he never failed to acknowledge that he was French, and when he was obliged to do so, he gave his first name, Benedict.

He was wholly indifferent to the things of this world, and enjoyed in silence that solid and triumphant joy, that caused Saint Paul to exclaim: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to

me, and I to the world." He paid no attention whatever to the insults, jests and indignities of the passers-by. And, when ill-treated, he blessed God and his enemies; he would purposely slacken his pace in order to enjoy these sufferings and humiliations to the utmost. The reason why he liked to go to the convent gates, when food was being distributed to the poor, was because he received insults and bad treatment from the other beggars.

These mendicants were most unmerciful, and they did not spare his feelings; they treated him as a fool, and mocked him. But Benedict profited by those occasions afforded him, to amass riches for eternity; he bore patiently with malevolent reports concerning his person. Those reports referred to the mystery surrounding him, as well as to the causes which obliged him to lead such a miserable life. The horror inspired by his mean garments, and the vermin crawling upon them, the loathing people seemed to have in the street and even at the threshold of the confessional, caused Benedict the greatest joy; for he felt he resembled his Divine Master who was reviled and despised.

He carefully avoided all questions concerning himself, and when pressed too closely by indirect questions, he answered as readily as another would acknowledge an honorable title, "I am a vagrant."

One day, Benedict Joseph met a man who had been his friend in childhood, and who had gone to Rome to make a pilgrimage. He most earnestly begged

Benedict to write a letter to his parents. "They have not heard from you, for a very long time," said he, "they know nothing of your way of living, nor are they acquainted with your place of residence. A single word from you, would comfort and reassure them." "Give them my love," replied Benedict, "and tell them I am happy. It is not necessary to write, and were I obliged to do so, I would write through the post office." These were the first words to reach Amette, since the time he had sent the letter from Chieri. Benedict, had accomplished to the letter, the words of Holy Scripture: "*Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee.*"

He did not always meet the humiliation and contempt, for which his soul so evidently longed. He was often the object of the greatest marks of respect and consideration; but such esteem caused him great agony. We remember how grieved he was, and how he sobbed and wept, when an old man, Father Fraja, threw himself at his feet, and embraced them. One day, a woman, called Laurentia Vandroli, met him in the street, and, pushing her little son towards the beggar, told him to kiss his hand. "Kiss my hand!" cried Benedict terrified, "kiss my hand!" And notwithstanding the entreaties of the good woman, he turned and fled.

Humility was the secret of Benedict's virtue; it was the first cause of all his actions and movements. He drew this humility from his constant intercourse

with God. His virginal soul, unfettered by love of earthly things, soared heavenward, as free and light as fragrant incense. When looking away from earth, Benedict Joseph contemplated the divine perfections, and God manifested himself to him in all his dazzling splendor; an extraordinary brightness, illumined his being, and in this light, he realized the grandeur of the Divinity, and was enraptured with beholding the magnificence and dignity of his God. Then, when reflecting that he was but a tiny object lost in space, a poor miserable creature hanging by a thread over an abyss, forever in rebellion against a loving father, he concluded that he could not hate and despise himself as much as he desired. One of his confessors, Father Marconi, says: "It is almost impossible to even imagine that a person could have so poor an opinion of himself." And he compares his humility to a sea whose depths are immeasurable.

It is with awe, that we touch upon all these glorious things. The angels alone could properly tell of the beauties created in Benedict's heart by divine grace. But, as our reasons for attempting to describe them seem to justify us, we trust our temerity will be pardoned. And, in fact, do not the souls of the saints elevate the souls of those who study them?

It was particularly when Benedict approached the sacraments, that his humility was most apparent; the desire to unite himself to God was counterbalanced

by the fear of receiving the Bread of Life in an unworthy manner. As we remember, this was one of his severest trials when in the monastery; and until the last day of his life, it was his only trouble, his only anxiety. At first, his confessors thought that his mind was deeply imbued with certain severe doctrines, which, at that time, were prevalent in France; doctrines which were as pretentious as they were ridiculous, and which exacted for Communion a love so pure that it cannot easily be found in mortal man. But his implicit obedience to all their commands, relieved them of this suspicion.

Divided between the consciousness of his unworthiness, and his desire to receive our Lord, he took the greatest care to purify his heart, which was a living ciborium, destined to contain Jesus, the King of Angels. His entire life was a preparation for Holy Communion. Before approaching the Sacrament of Penance, he redoubled his prayers and meditations, and, according to Father Temple, these prayers and meditations were the source of his humility. He examined all his actions and their causes with the most scrupulous attention. In his opinion, his daily examinations of conscience, did not exempt him from this careful study of his actions, when preparing to receive these great sacraments.

When kneeling, before making his confession, he trembled, says one of his biographers, from head to foot. His face was covered with confusion; large tears dropped from his eyes, and a priest, seeing him

for the first time, would naturally suppose him to be some great criminal loaded with sins.

He would accuse himself of ingratitude for not appreciating the innumerable favors he had received from God; of unfaithfulness in the service of his good master; of the coldness of his heart for a God who loved him so much, and other such general accusations. But in vain did the confessor ask him, what precept he had broken, what obligation he had violated, what virtue he had sinned against. He could not accuse himself of a real fault, although he examined the most secret recesses of his conscience. The minister of God, requiring matter for absolution, would request his penitent to accuse the sins of his past life, and although he reviewed his whole life, he could not find a single wilful sin. Consequently, he felt convinced that this pure soul had preserved its baptismal innocence. He was certain he saw before him one of the elect, a saint. To listen to Benedict, one would think him the prodigal son just returned from his wanderings, to meet his father who is good enough to receive him with open arms. He wept over his sins as Magdalen did; he could not find expressions enough to deplore his crimes, and to pledge himself to serve his good master better in the future. On beholding such deep contrition, the confessor felt abashed to think that he, a real sinner, was far from feeling the grievousness of sin as deeply as this righteous man.

After leaving the tribunal of penance, the joys of

reconcilation did not cause Benedict to forget his acts of penance; on the contrary, he redoubled them, and spent the rest of the day, preparing his soul to receive Holy Communion the next morning; fo, Benedict, very different from those persons who sometimes pass directly from the confessional to the Holy Table, made it a rule to put off his communion until the day following the confession, in order to prepare his soul in a becoming manner. Nevertheless, he was ever ready to obey the commands and even the desires of his confessors. Notwithstanding the poor opinion he had of himself, he would lay aside his own rule and receive the Bread of Angels, as soon as he had finished his confession. He even received communion several times between his confessions, but now in one church, now in another, so as to hide the number of his communions, for fear he should be considered good. In Benedict's eyes, his confessor was the living representive of Jesus Christ, and willingly did he follow all his advice.

It would be impossible to relate the sentiments, and raptures of this holy soul when about to be united to God in the most Holy Sacrament! On beholding the Tabernacle, his love seemed to overpower him; his breathing became short and quick, his face, which was generally colorless, assumed a glow from the interior fire of his soul, his features, generally so grave and serious, were brightened by an angelic smile, and his lips murmured inarticulate sounds, the echo of the sublime hymns sung in the depths of his soul.

If the Holy Eucharist, hidden from view in the shadow of the sanctuary, made Benedict feel beside himself for love, and rendered him altogether insensible to the things of this world, what must have taken place within him when the Blessed Sacrament rested on his burning lips, and descended into his heart which sighed only for the Bread of Heaven. "Little children," said Father Temple, "do not seek their mother with greater ardor, than did Benedict to kneel at the Holy Table. Nor do they press their parched lips to her life-giving breast with more avidity than our illustrious mendicant when he received the Sacred Body of Jesus Christ."

"Benedict Joseph," says another witness, "was so passionate in his desire to approach the Holy Table, that sometimes, he seemed on the point of darting forward, so as to receive the Sacred Host a little sooner. He would be heard to exclaim, 'My Good, my Sovereign Good! My all! the only object of my love! Ah! come, I long after thee, I wait for thee, I sigh after thee. The least delay appears to me a thousand years. Come my Lord Jesus come, do not tarry!'" His features were overspread with a bright light, and there was an inexplicable something about his person that enraptured and brought consolation. His miserable rags, and repulsive vermin, were forgotten; those who surrounded him saw but the wonders wrought within him, and felt touched and inclined to devotion. They found themselves unaccountably begging of God to grant them a little of his fervor.

When the mystery was accomplished, when the Sacred Host, after resting a moment on his parched lips, descended into his heart, a heart as pure as the gold of the tabernacle, then, the holy beggar experienced rapturous joy, such as is not of this world. It is impossible to relate all the wonders attending such communions. Although the human language is very rich in expressions, still, it has no words to explain such things.

Father Temple, unobserved, detected more than once on Benedict's lips, the language of his enraptured soul in possession of its God, and awed by such close contact with its Redeemer.

Let us listen to the good priest's account. We can imagine that we hear a canticle from the harps of Seraphim upon our miserable earth; "My Lord Jesus! may I mortify myself, and live for Thee alone. May I accept all that happens, as coming from Thy hand; may I be my own persecutor, may I always follow Thee, and may I wish more and more to follow Thee! may I ever flee from myself, to take refuge in Thee. May I become worthy to have Thee for protector and defender. May I fear for myself and fear Thee, that I may be numbered among the elect. May I ever mistrust myself, and wholly confide in Thee. May I be ready to obey through love of Thee May I never love anything but Thee alone; may I be ever watchful over myself, so as to divert my affections towards Thee. Call me to Thee, that I may see Thee in Heaven, enjoy Thy love for eternity."

Often, during the long hours that followed his communions and which he passed in thanksgiving, he might be seen kneeling in an obscure corner, his eyes fixed upon the tabernacle and he himself surrounded by a supernatural light.

Undoubtedly God appeared to him there in His beauty, as he formerly appeared to that humble woman Margaret Mary, to whom he confided the mission to spread the devotion to His Sacred Heart all over the world. Such sublime privileges are granted only to those pure souls that are free from the dross of the earth; like Adam before his sad fall, they converse familiarly with God, and ascend to regions accessible only to Angels! Something of this glory was visible in Benedict's face. And a woman who witnessed the wonderful things exclaimed, "O happy mortal, who can tell what you now behold!"

The "Summary of Theology," that grand work of Thomas Aquinas, to which nothing can compare in either modern or ancient times, is a work sprung from the saint's heart wholly attached to its God; it is not due to his vast intellect alone. Those wonderful pages were written at the foot of the Crucifix, rather than in that great doctor's cell. An angel from Heaven, had touched Thomas' lips and girded his loins with the tincture of chastity. And Thomas, freed from the corruption of this world, and borne upon the the powerful wings of love and innocence, soared far above the earth, and fixed his eagle eye upon God.

God manifested Himself to St. Thomas, as he formerly did in the fragrant bowers of Eden, when He appeared to the first man.

St. Thomas, after having contemplated the immensity of God, and the mysteries that surrounded Him, returned from that flight into the regions of eternity, and related to mankind in pages that will never be forgotten, all that he had seen, heard and touched. This extraordinary privilege is granted only to chosen souls, to those whose purity resembles that of the Angels!

Benedict Labre, was one of these favored mortals. Like St. Thomas, he also, was drawn towards God by an ardent love, and if an angel did not come and extinguish in his heart, as in Saint Thomas', the fire of concupiscence, he himself triumphed over the flesh, by the power of penance and mortification. And that is why, he also, freed from bad inclinations and the slavery of sin, and crowned with chastity, ascended towards God, contemplating Him with humble gaze, and amorous ecstasy mingled with reverent awe. And according to all his biographers, this contemplation gave him a clear, plain, and precise, idea of God, of His infinite perfections, and His incomprehensible mysteries.

Benedict Joseph, as well as St. Thomas, had fully realised the word of the Divine Master: *Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt.* Blessed are the pure of Heart! they alone shall see God. They do not require arguments or disquisitions. The eyes of

their minds are open to heavenly truths, and the divine perfections are made apparent.

These joys and consolations can alone account for Benedict's perseverance in prayer. He passed long hours, and as we have already said, whole days rapt in contemplation, without even thinking of taking the least nourishment, entirely absorbed in the consideration of the sublime things manifested to him by heavenly light. Such perseverance was above human nature, for, since the fall of our first parents in the Garden, man naturally turns from God, fears to meet Him face to face, and all celestial contemplation is irksome and a burden to him. It is only by union with Christ, that he will find his way and seek for truth and his true home.

This unwearying constancy was remarked wherever he went, at Fabriano, at Loreto, and especially at Rome. A great many went to Santa Maria dei Monti, purposely to see him, so as to enliven their faith and learn to apply themselves more zealously to meditation. His thoughts were not of this world, and more than one sexton took infinite care not to disturb him, by preventing doors from slamming, and by not passing too near him, when performing their functions. His demeanor before the altar was a real sermon, and only to look at him, was sufficient to make one feel better.

It is related that a priest, who later became a bishop, placed himself as near as possible to Benedict, without having him notice it, and experienced the

greatest fervor in his prayer from this proximity to the holy beggar. As for Benedict, nothing could disturb him, and he was as motionless as a marble statue. Like the Apostles on Mount Tabor he was admitted to the vision of God and, more privileged than they, he built his tabernacle with the Lord.

During these ecstasies, and while his body was prostrated on the bare and cold marble, his soul ascended to God. The whole court of Heaven received his homage and veneration. But it was to Mary, the mother of God and men, that he paid particular homage. From his childhood, he had chosen her as his special patroness. He himself said so at the Penitenziaria of Loreto. When in obedience to the commands of the Gospel, he left his country, home and kindred, he wished for no other mother but Mary; and henceforth, he gave himself up unreservedly to the service of the Queen of Heaven, who seldom had a more loving and devoted son. As a distinguishing mark of his devotion for our Lady, he wore the rosary suspended to his neck, and never took it off until his death. Whether he was seen on the highway or on the street, in church or on a pilgrimage, by day or by night, he wore that rosary; it was his chosen ornament; and never did gallant captain wear more proudly the decoration displayed on his breast, than this poor beggar carried his beads.

Benedict Joseph honored Mary under all the titles with which the Church presents her to us, during the

course of the ecclesiastical year, but more particularly as the Mother of Sorrows. As we have endeavored to show, Benedict could not picture Our Savior to himself otherwise than suffering the torments of the Passion, or nailed to the cross; consequently, his devotion to Mary, the mother of the crucified One, was greater when he considered her as assisting at the bloody drama of the Praetorium and Calvary. The sorrowful mother was the object of his tenderest affections.

Loving Our Lady as he did, he could not forget the companion of her earthly life, the noble spouse who was at the same time Mary's guardian, and the foster father of her divine son. Did not Pius the IX., amidst the applause of the Catholic world, proclaim St. Joseph patron of the universal church? And was his not the name Benedict had received in Baptism? "I understood," said Gabrini, "his devotion to St. Joseph from the pious manner in which he told me he had received communion on his feast day, and from his invariable custom of approaching the sacraments whenever that anniversary occurred." It was one of Benedict's greatest consolations to think he had been born in the Roman Catholic Church. The day of his baptism, was for him, a day blessed among all other days, and the two patrons who were then given him, Saint Joseph and Saint Benedict, always had a prominent place in his affections. The same worship and the same devotion were united in the mendicant's heart; the chief of the holy family of

Nazareth, and the originator of the large family of voluntary beggars.

In all his travels, he never lost sight of the presence of his angel guardian. When on the road, he was fond of conversing softly and affectionately with him, as with a brother. After his angel guardian, he honored St. James the Major in a special manner, and had chosen him as the protector of his pilgrimages and the second companion of his travels. His respect for Saint Benedict extended to all the disciples of this grand patriarch; to all those who, following his examples and his precepts, espoused poverty, that bride clothed in divine blessings, and adorned with heavenly graces; to Saint Romuald, Saint Anthony of Padua, and to Saint Francis.

Among those generous souls who condemned themselves to voluntary poverty, he did not forget the seraphic son of Assisi. Benedict Joseph visited all the monuments founded by the ardent and sublime spouse of poverty, in the mountains of Tuscany and Umbria; he endeavored to walk in his footsteps, and, we may assume, that Francis of Assisi never had a follower who resembled him more closely. They had both given up their family, but possessed the same spirit of absolute poverty, the same thirst for mortification, the same preservance in austerity, the same love for heavenly things; they had the same heart, and with the exception of the stigmata, and the foundation of the Franciscan Order, we discover Saint Francis in Benedict Joseph. After the saints in

Paradise, and the heavenly spirits, after the mother of God and her chaste spouse, after the Sovereign Creator of heaven and earth, Benedict loved and respected the sacerdotal hierarchy, that represents God on earth.

Benedict felt for the clergy, a profound veneration which was united to inexpressible tenderness and devotedness. He never remained seated in their presence and always quickly raised his hat; it was only after being repeatedly invited to do so, that he would remain seated.

If one of the clergy asked him to accompany him on the street, Benedict never dared walk by his side, but always remained at a respectful distance behind.

A pious custom exists in Italy, that of kissing the priest's hands, those consecrated by the bishop with holy oil on the great day of ordination, and which seem to receive daily a new consecration by their contact with the Sacred Body of Our Savior. It would be impossible to describe the piety and love with which Benedict fulfilled that holy duty.

But among all the priests, it was to the Holy Father that Benedict gave the most distinguished honor. He never heard or pronounced his name, without bowing his head. The Pope was, in his eyes, the most elevated in rank, and most powerful man in the world.

In his eyes no monarch or potentate could compare with him since the Pope was the vicar of Jesus

Christ, or rather as he delighted to call him, the Vice-God on earth.

Such was the heart of Benedict Joseph Labre, a heart composed of charity, obedience, mortification, and purity. Like pure crystal, it reflected the heart of God, the Holy Ghost resided in it with all His graces. Our Lord Jesus Christ, established His throne therein, and the angels spreading their white wings over it, protected it from the poisonous blast of the world.

Concluding this chapter, a reminiscence is recalled to our memory. A few years ago, some free-thinkers in France, disinterred the shriveled heart of Voltaire, and exhibited it to the public for veneration; but the public laughed at such an act of folly and audacity. That was right; for Voltaire had an evil, corrupt, heart; no generous sentiment ever dwelt within it; hatred alone was its only impulse, hatred for everything good and holy, viz., God, country, and innocence. But when, on the 20th of May, 1860, Pius IX., surrounded by his cardinals and the splendor of his court, presented to the world the heart of blessed Benedict Joseph of Amette, the same people who had despised Voltaire and his character, bowed their heads in respect before the humble mendicant clothed in ragged garments, thus proclaiming, that true glory proceeds from virtue. Blessed Benedict Labre, make us resemble thee!

CHAPTER XII.

HIS LAST PILGRIMAGE TO LORETO.

ENEDICT JOSEPH remained a pilgrim until his last day, for it was his calling, and he lived up to it.

Toward the end of his life, when his health was so shattered by penance and privations of all sorts, that he could no longer think of undertaking long journeys to Spain, Germany or France, he did not fail to go every year to Loreto. Nothing prevented him from making this pilgrimage, not even the severity of the winters, the wretched condition of his garments or the poor state of his health.

Such a vocation terrifies human thought, and its severity is almost unequalled. The monk has his cell, his cloister that he loves, and is bound by charity to every inmate of the monastery. Another link also binds him to the things of this world, his rules and pious habits in a monastery. The life Benedict had chosen, is more trying to nature, and it adds a few more drops to the bitter chalice to be drained before the reward can be claimed. It allows of no

affection for any place or person, and leaves the heart entirely deprived of all human sympathies, the only consolation consisting in the love of Jesus Christ, above all. The pilgrim is more dead to the world, than is the monk or cenobite.

It was in the year 1782, on the 6th day of March, that Benedict left Rome, as he was wont to do and set out for Loreto. He met with great obstacles in crossing the Apennines, for the cold was intense, and the snow which fell in large flakes, soon covered up the roads, so that it was almost impossible to avoid getting lost. The journey was an extremely difficult one. Nevertheless, after a few days of great fatigue, Benedict reached Tolentino. He had already passed through that city several times, and had even distributed relics there.

While he was directing his steps towards the cathedral, where the Forty Hours' Devotion was taking place, he met a woman, Catherine Gentili, to whom a few years previously he had brought manna* from the tomb of St. Nicholas of Bari. She asked him for some more, and as he had none, and did not wish so pious a request to go unrewarded, he offered her a brass medal. Catherine examined it, then returned it, telling him to give it to somebody else. "And who knows," said Benedict smiling, "if I shall ever pass here again." Then he offered her a small brass crucifix, which she also refused saying: "Do not be displeased, but I feel as much obliged to you, as though

*The flowering ash, a native of the south of Europe,

I accepted your present." Benedict then said: "In case I die at Rome, remember my name; I am called Benedict Labre." He repeated this twice, then departed.

On the afternoon of Holy Thursday, the 28th of March, he reached Loreto, and hastened to the home of the Sori family. "Praised be Jesus Christ," said he on entering. Then he added: "In accordance with your request of last year, I have come straight to your home. I trust you will pardon my boldness. Perhaps I make too free." "You are welcome," joyously exclaimed Barbara. "We have been waiting for you for several days past. Your room is ready. But how weary you look! Rest yourself for at least a few minutes, and take a little food." "Oh! thank you," said Benedict. "But if you will allow me, I will put away my satchel, and then go to greet our dear lady. I will return here this evening."

And he did return to the house that evening after Tenebrae. Barbara was busy preparing some supper for her humble guest, and Benedict, fearing that her solicitude for his poor person had prevented her from assisting at the office, spoke to her on the subject. "Fear not," said she, "I assisted at Tenebrae with yourself, and returned in time to attend to my household duties." Then, changing the subject she asked: "Did it take you very long to reach Loreto this year?" "Yes," answered Benedict, "twenty-two days. The cold was intense, and the roads were almost impassable. I wandered away, and it was only with the greatest trouble, that I reached Tolentino."

Barbara, who was moved to tears, offered to have a fire made in his room, but as he refused, she asked him to at least draw near the fire-place and warm himself.

He acceded to her request, and stood a few minutes by the hearth, where a cheerful fire was burning; but soon returned to his former position, saying that it was not cold in his room. Supper was now ready, and in order to celebrate the arrival of the holy young man, Barbara had prepared a dish of roes from a certain fish. Benedict did not wish to partake of it, saying: "It is too delicate a dish for a beggar," but as Barbara insisted, to please her, he ate a very little piece of it. Then, in order to avoid Barbara's pressing invitation to partake of more, he suddenly changed the conversation, and asked her if they had any news of Pius VI., who was on his way to Vienna, and if they had had many strangers. "Yes, thanks be to God," said Barbara. "Several horsemen came and lodged at our inn." And among other details she told him how much money she had earned.

This conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Gaudentius Sori, who, after welcoming Benedict, told him he had been to Rome during the autumn, and had done all in his power to meet him, but his efforts had been vain. "If you had asked for me in the quarter of Santa Maria Maggiore, you would certainly have found me," said Benedict.

As Gaudentius noticed that his humble guest had nearly finished his repast, he offered to show him to

his room, so that he might rest after his long journey and said: "In former years, I noticed you kept your clothes on when you retired, even if they were wet from rain. Be careful not to do so to-night; undress yourself and rest in your bed." And after bidding him good night, he promised to return to see him in the morning, after having listened to the sermon on the Passion of our Lord. "Sleep until late to-morrow morning," continued Gaudentius, "for after the fatigue of your long journey, and owing to the bad state of your health, you require a longer rest than usual."

But such was not Benedict's intention, for to remain in bed when the Passion of our Lord was being explained, seemed to him to be a real sacrilege. "Oh, no! I do not wish to miss the sermon on such a day." And, fearing to oversleep himself, on account of his great weariness, he begged Gaudentius to call him early.

The next morning, Benedict was up at the designated hour, and was one of the first at the Basilica. He assisted at the sublime offices of that mournful solemnity with the liveliest emotion, and spent the rest of the day in church, without tasting a morsel of food, meditating upon the sufferings of our Divine Lord. In the evening, while they were chanting Matins, he took his place at the confessional of Father Francis Mary Almerici. This religious had heard a great deal about Benedict, but he had never seen him. When he saw the pious beggar kneel so devoutly beside his con-

fessional, and piously await his turn, he immediately supposed he was the pilgrim of whom he had heard so many good remarks. He longed to speak to him, and instinctively made him a sign to approach. Benedict obeyed, and kneeling at the grating, commenced his confession.

"Never did I meet such holy innocence," relates Father Almerici "united to such deep contrition." Benedict Joseph could not specify any particular fault, but accused himself of being lukewarm in the service of God, of ingratitude toward his Savior, and of having very little zeal in the accomplishment of his duties as a Christian. During this recital, his voice was choked by sobs, and large tears fell from his eyes.

"I was surprised and delighted, and the more I studied this truly privileged soul, the more my admiration increased. Kneeling at my feet, was a seraphim clothed in mortal flesh. I told him to receive holy communion the next morning, which was Holy Saturday, and again on the blessed day of Easter." On hearing this, Benedict began to tremble in every limb, declaring that he was unworthy to receive the body of our Lord.

When night had come, Benedict returned to his temporary home with the Sori family. The table was laid, and the supper consisted in some soup and a few little fish. Benedict was pensive and lost in thought, *tutto pensieroso*. Finally noticing the table and the food spread upon it, he cried: "Oh! is this

a night to eat? On this day, Jesus Christ had only vinegar and gall for nourishment." "That is true," replied Barbara, "but how shall we pray if we do not eat?" This argument, although very reasonable, did not change Benedict's mind. He asked for a few herbs, a piece of bread, and a glass of water, which, he said, was a suitable repast for a beggar on Good Friday. "I do not wish to contradict you to-night," said Barbara. Then she added: "Yes, our dear Lord suffered very much, and I cannot endure the least pain, the least inconvenience, which makes me fear I shall not be saved." On hearing these words, Benedict bowed his head and began to meditate. Then he suddenly arose and said: "You are afraid, and I am afraid also. How shall I be saved?"

The next morning, Benedict returned to Father Almerici's confessional before approaching the holy table; not that he needed to purify his conscience of new faults, but to exaggerate again his unworthiness and imperfections. Father Almerici, was more and more convinced that God had permitted him to meet with an extraordinary soul. From the answers he received from this ragged beggar, he felt certain that the latter was initiated to the most sublime mysteries. He quieted Benedict's fears as well as he could, and when about to leave him, he asked him how many times he had come to Loreto? "Ten or eleven times," answered Benedict. "And will you come back next year?" asked his confessor. "No, Father," answered the holy beggar. "Why not?" inquired Father Almerici. "Be-

cause I am going home," said Benedict. "But where is your home?" continued the priest. "At Rome," answered the servant of God. "But, will you not pass by Loreto, on your way home?" Father Almerici thought that by home, Benedict meant France. "No Father," replied the saint, "I am going home." "Then you give up seeing Loreto again," asked the good priest. "Father," said Benedict, with a peculiar accent, "I am going home."

Benedict Joseph was not mistaken, for the following year, he had taken leave of this land of exile, and gone to his true home—Heaven. The angel who had stayed for such a short while among mortals, spread his beautiful white wings, and triumphantly took his flight heavenward.

The Sori family were thoroughly Christian people. The reader must have become convinced of it, from the respectful and kind welcome they gave Benedict every year.

A pious and touching custom existed in that family, which, for years, had been handed down from father to son, as the most precious inheritance. On holidays, they always invited some very poor person in the neighborhood to dine with them. In 1782, as Benedict happened to be at Loreto, Barbara and Gaudentius invited him to share the paschal feast with them on Easter-eve, on his return from the Basilica. But Benedict did not accept it, for, as he told them, he would be obliged to leave the church at noon, and thus lose some very precious moments which he

desired to consecrate to God. And moreover, he had made a practice to eat but one meal a day, and that, in the evening. Gaudentius insisted, hoping to overcome his objections by his entreaties. But it was useless. Benedict requested them to allow him to do as he desired. Barbara interfered, and took Benedict's part, but on the condition that, in the evening, he should accept his share of the family feast, to which Benedict willingly consented.

The day after Easter, Benedict Joseph again visited Father Almerici, who adroitly turned the conversation upon questions of theology, but was very careful not to startle the saint's humility. All that he had heard him say, on the preceding days, concerning the sublime mysteries of the Catholic religion, only tended to excite in him the desire to hear him again. On this occasion, the subject of conversation was the Holy Trinity. Benedict expressed himself with precision and in beautiful language. "It was delightful," the religious relates, "to listen to this ragged beggar speaking of the relations between the Three Divine Persons, and of those, which in his opinion, exist between the Blessed Trinity and the Passion of Our Redeemer. Benedict treated these difficult questions with wonderful ease. I imagined I was listening to Saint Theresa; for he possessed the same purity of language, the same clearness, the same warmth of expression. Oh! how I regret being unable to recall his own words and reproduce them. No, he was not a mere pupil, imparting the knowledge he had acquir-

ed from persistent study, and frequent references to the great authors, but a traveler who narrated simply and profoundly all that he had seen and noticed during his journeys."

Benedict frequently interrupted himself, to say that he was only an ignorant being, who could but poorly express his thoughts; begged to be excused for daring, he, a vile worm of the earth, to speak on such learned subjects in the presence of a priest.

He made use of this occasion in order to conceal in all humility the theological science he might have exhibited to his astonished confessor. Father Almerici noticed this, but he did not dare insist; he was restrained by a certain respect; and besides, he feared to wound Benedict's feelings. He felt, that if he questioned him further, in spite of his tact and prudence, he would reveal to the pious beggar the estimation in which he held of him.

Easter evening, Benedict returned to his lodging, in accordance with his promise of the preceding day. Barbara had spread the table, and laid upon it the refreshments reserved for Benedict Joseph, which were more plentiful than usual. He consented to taste them, and even took a little of the paschal lamb, and a few drops of wine.

While partaking of his repast, he looked pensive and melancholy; a cloud of sadness seemed to hang on his brow, which was generally so clear and bright. His hosts noticed that he was not in his usual mood, which was grave, yet at the same time cheerful.

They were remarking this among themselves, when Benedict raised his hand and said: "Oh! what commotion and inattention there was in the Basilica today!" Gaudentius told him he should not be surprised at that, considering the large number of people in attendance, and that the city possessed but one church. "And besides," said he, "there were a great many of them from the country, where people are mostly simple and ignorant." "The ignorant people were not the only inattentive ones," replied Benedict. "I was scandalized just as much by persons finely dressed and highly considered in the world." He then asked to be permitted to go a little later to church on the two following days, and on Monday and Tuesday he went to church only at *tierce*.

This year, Benedict did not meet his friend Gaspard Valeri, as often as in former years, or as often as he would have wished. He told this to Barbara, who hastened to inform that good priest. Father Gaspard had been very busy at the Basilica during holy week, but as soon as his numerous duties permitted, he went to Gaudentius Sori's house. For some time past, he had entertained certain doubts concerning the pious beggar, which he was anxious to clear away. He asked himself if Benedict had made his Easter duty? He had not seen him receive communion, and he knew no one who could give any positive information on that important point. Taking Gaudentius and Barbara aside, he communicated his fears to them. They acknowledged they had never seen

him receive Holy Communion, but stated there need be no occasion for apprehension. They said they were sure Benedict Joseph had his confessor in Rome, and that on returning thither from Loreto, it was natural to suppose he would give him an account of all his actions. "How can we doubt that he does not perform his Easter duty, he who is so pious and attentive to his religious duties," added Barbara. Father Valeri thought this very good reasoning; still he doubted as before. The next day, he questioned Benedict directly, and asked him if he had made his Easter duty. Benedict answered that before leaving Rome, he had fulfilled that obligation. Such an answer was not of an nature to satisfy Father Gaspard. Therefore, he proposed to say Mass for him at the Santa Casa, so that he might receive communion. "Do you hear confessions?" asked the servant of God. "No," said Father Valeri; "but my brother Louis does. I only desire to give you the Sacred Host." "How can a sinner such as I am, and a beggar so badly clothed, present himself at the Holy Table, in such a sacred place?" asked Benedict. "And what difference does it make, if I receive Holy Communion in the Santa Casa, or at any other altar?"

These words, far from quieting Father Valeri's fears, only tended to increase them. Barbara, who but a moment before had had so much confidence in her humble guest, began to waver in her faith. The next morning, as soon as Benedict had left the house, she took the liberty of searching her guest's satchel, in which

she found several letters written in Latin and French. She wondered what they contained, but could not decipher them herself. Just at that moment, a French priest, Lawrence Cayla, happened to be passing in the street. She called him in, and requested him to read the papers she held in her hand. One was the certificate of Sept-Fonts, which stated that Benedict often approached the sacraments. Another paper certified that Benedict had received Holy Communion in Rome; the third one was another certificate of confession given in 1772 by Father Andrew Bodetti, in presence of Lawrence Cayla himself, who recognized it. Barbara hastened to acquaint Father Valeri with the discovery she had made; but he had already learned through his brother, that the French beggar had received communion several times, and particularly at Easter. The cloud of momentary doubt, that had obscured their minds, soon vanished, establishing their trust in Benedict more strongly than before. They were happy to know that he had always deserved the esteem and respectful affection they had bestowed upon him.

Perhaps we have lingered too long over these incidents, the details of which may be read in the preliminary investigations. But, we hope the reader will readily pardon us. We resemble the traveler, who, meeting with a beautiful landscape, stops to admire the magnificent panorama before him; he endeavors to impress every detail upon his memory, for he knows that in a few moments, he will no longer behold it.

We have followed our holy beggar step by step, listening to his words, and trying to read his very thoughts. And, is it not, in fact, the last time that we shall meet Benedict Joseph at Loreto? Are we not soon to see him breathe his last sigh?

The Wednesday evening after Easter, Benedict informed the Sori family, that he intended leaving the next day. "Why, you have not been with us a week," exclaimed Barbara. "Remain with us until after Low Sunday at least?" "A week is long enough," replied he. "I need to go away, and I must go." And, as she told him, not to fail to come to their house on his return to Loreto the following year, he smiled and said: "If I do not return, we shall meet in Heaven."

The next morning, Benedict met Gaudentius at his store door, and the latter, always very thoughtful and considerate, asked his guest if there was anything he needed before leaving. Benedict Joseph replied that he would willingly accept a crucifix, as the one he had been wearing on his breast under his garments was broken. Gaudentius gave him a brass crucifix and then told him to return to his house on the following year. "If I do not return," replied Benedict, "we shall meet in Heaven."

That same morning Thursday, the 4th of April, Father Angelo Verdelli, another of Benedict's friends, met him at the Basilica, and gave him a relic of the Santa Casa, and as he knew he was about to leave Loreto, he took leave of him and said: "I suppose

you will return next year?" "I do not know," replied Benedict. Then after a pause he added: "If it is God's will, we shall meet in Heaven."

Towards noon, Benedict returned to the Sori family in order to bid them a final adieu. Father Valeri was there, and asked him in his turn, if he should return on the following year. "It will be very difficult for me to do so," replied Benedict. "But, if I do not return, we shall meet in Heaven." It seems to us that this persistence in saying, that he would not return the following year, should have excited remark but no one noticed it.

When, a year later however, they heard of Benedict's death, they all recalled his words, which seemed truly prophetic, when compared with his usual manner of taking leave of them. He was in the habit of saying: "With God's help, we shall meet again."

Benedict set out with his staff in his hand, and his satchel thrown over his shoulder; the satchel contained a piece of bread that Barbara gave him. Father Valeri offered to accompany him as far as Montreale, but Benedict objected, saying that people would find it strange to see a priest in company with such a miserable beggar. And, repeating his accustomed salutation: "Praised be Jesus Christ," he started with a light heart and elastic step, knowing full well that he was about to enter his own true country.

CHAPTER XIII.

HIS DEATH.

HEN Benedict reached Rome, he appeared to his friends as the shadow of his former self. The hardships of the long journey, and the privations of all sorts to which he had been exposed, had made great ravages on his constitution. His biographers say he had scarcely breath enough to speak.

The most ordinary human prudence required that, for a few days at least, Benedict should rest, remitting his austerities and laying aside his hair shirt. But such was not the view of Benedict, who burning with divine love and following the example of St. Paul, his illustrious predecessor in the paths of penance, longed for the ruin of that house of clay, which prevented his soul from taking its flight towards God.

As the traveler, overtaken by night, quickens his pace in order to reach the nearest inn before the sun disappears from the horizon, so Benedict, feeling that his end was approaching, and with it, that night during which it is not allowed to work, hastened to

accumulate spiritual riches by adding mortification to mortification, so as to be judged worthy to enter heaven.

His pale countenance, emaciated body, and weary look, announced nearing dissolution. His friends were desirous to keep this pious servant of God among them as long as possible; therefore they begged of him to be careful of his health. One day a good and pious woman, named Mary Dominica Bravi, met him as he was leaving the Basilica of the Lateran on his way to S. Croce in Gerusalemme; he looked so pale and feeble, that she bought some buns at a neighboring stall, and offered them to him saying: "Benedict Joseph you are ill; you are fading away."

But Benedict was probably listening to the heavenly music of the angels, who were preparing a welcome for his beautiful soul which was soon to join them; for he seemed to hear nothing, and to be quite unconscious of everything taking place around him.

While his body was gradually wasting away, his soul was being filled with heavenly light; a bright halo surrounded his forehead, and each minute, each hour, added to its dazzling beauty. It was a reflection of that light which was to be Benedict's raiment for eternity, and which already enveloped his soul; its rays escaped from that holy sanctuary in proportion, as the prison of his body mouldered away. His flesh seemed to be transfigured, and to have assumed that quality which does not belong to the flesh, of which St. Augustine says: *It is something unlike flesh*

in flesh itself. It was impossible to look upon him without being affected to tears, and without involuntarily repeating those words so often detected on the lips of his friends: "He is an angel!" Benedict did not change his way of living, even during the last moments of his life. In the morning he always went to visit the church of Santa Maria dei Monti, and remained the same length of time in prayer, in the afternoon he accomplished his various devotions in the deserted church, in the edifices dedicated to the Passion and wherever the Blessed Sacrament was exposed during he Forty Hours Devotion.

He might be met on lonely roads on the outskirts of the city, near the Scala Santa, at St. Sisto, or at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. People wondered how he could drag himself through the streets, and even kneel or stand in the churches.

Notwithstanding the sufferings which he endured, and his exhausted condition, which he could not fail to notice, he was as calm and cheerful as when enjoying perfect health. He was satisfied with his life, satisfied with his misery, and satisfied with his vocation which God had given him. Heavenly peace reigned in his heart, and his Divine Master lavished his favors and blessings upon him.

During the last weeks of his life, we would like to follow him step by step, and like Theresa Massarotti, one of his numerous admirers, endeavor to walk in his footseps.

On the Monday of Holy Week, the 14th of April,

Benedict Joseph was at his post, Sta. M. dei Monti, at the dawn of day. He did not remain kneeling very long at a time, for his weakness overcame his will ; he was obliged to sit down, and finally to leave the church. Father Melis, who had just celebrated mass, noticed that he had left the church ; he found his beads, breviary and a few pieces of money on the railing ; taking these objects, he went in search of Benedict, in order to restore them to him. He met him in the street, leaning against a wall, and seeing how ill he looked, he begged him to go to an hospital, whither he would accompany him himself. But Benedict firmly refused the good priest's offer. To enter a hospital was, for him, to give up visiting Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and nothing in the world could induce him to make such a sacrifice.

He reëntered Santa Maria dei Monti, and several hours later, he was at St. Ignatius' Church, receiving Holy Communion from the hands of Father Louis Balducci, who afterwards declared that he never felt such great fervor and inward consolation as on that day. The thought that a saint was assisting at his mass was constantly in his mind, and incited him to greater devotion. When he placed the Host upon Benedict's lips, and saw the bright glow that tinged his cheeks, he felt an unutterable peace fill his soul, as though he had a foretaste of heaven.

In the afternoon, after Benedict had paid a short visit to the church Santa Maria dei Monti, he fainted in front of Cardinal Albani's palace. People quickly

gathered around him, and on looking at him, they saw immediately that this weakness was caused by inanition. Among other things they offered him a little wine, which he at first refused, but when urged to do so, he very reluctantly swallowed a few drops.

It seemed a sin to Benedict to yield in the least to nature. He desired to suffer through love for Jesus, and in order to resemble his Divine Master more closely, he wished to drink vinegar, during the few days that remained for him to live. To those who wanted to prevent this act of mortification, and told him his health could not endure such a beverage, he replied: "Jesus drank it when he was dying for love of us."

The next day, Tuesday, his health seemed worse, and it was evident he had not long to live. He was found stretched upon the ground near the church Santa Maria del Pascolo, which is in the neighborhood of dei Monti. It was thought he was dying.

But he revived a little, and in the course of the forenoon went to the Church of St. Praxedes, where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed for the Forty Hours Devotion. Father Melis saw him standing in a corner, near the chapel of La Santa Colonna, rapt in contemplation. He looked pitiable, and the good priest's heart was filled with compassion for him.

As Zaccarelli remarked, it was only the Holy Ghost who could give him strength. His face was like that of a corpse, his eyes were hollow, his limbs weak, and his step uncertain.

Towards four o'clock in the afternoon, the saint was sitting in front of the Church dei Monti. Zaccarelli happened to pass accompanied by a priest. They approached Benedict and asked him how he felt, but the sick man did not reply. Zaccarelli, seeing him so feeble, was filled with compassion, and offered to take him to his home. "I shall be most happy to receive you," said the pious Christian. Benedict kept his eyes fixed upon the ground and did not answer. "It is God's will that we should take care of our health," continued Zaccarelli. Benedict remained motionless, his head bent upon his breast. Suddenly he raised himself up and said, in a strong voice: "I wish to go to church. How long they take to open the doors today!" Zaccarelli, seeing that his entreaties were of no avail, left him, saying to himself: "How he despises his poor body! How he sighs for heaven!"

In the evening, Benedict Joseph assisted at the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, in the Church of Santa Maria di Loreto, at the northern extremity of Trajan's forum. A person fearing for his health, said: "Do you wish to die in the street?" "What would it signify," answered Benedict, shrugging his shoulders.

"That night, when Benedict Joseph returned to St. Martin's," says his friend, Antonin Bartolotti, who was an inmate of the institution; "he was pale, weary, and nearly dead." For the first time since he resided in the hospital, he requested permission of the keeper to go directly to his bed. But instead of

lying down, he simply sat upon it, and leaned his head against the wall, whilst awaiting for the hour of prayer. He did not wish to depart from his usual rule, which was to retire after the others, when the light had been extinquished.

The next morning Benedict was up, when the signal, "Praised be Jesus Christ," was given to arise. His friends endeavored in vain, to make him keep his bed, or at least remain in the hospital.

Benedict Joseph dragged himself, as best he could, to his favorite church, Santa Mari dei Monti. For the last time he went to prostrate himself before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and His Blessed Mother. According to Zaccarelli he scarcely breathed; still he heard several masses, and during the reading of the Passion, he experienced such fervor, that it was feared he would die. He was so weak, that he was obliged to sit down several times, and about nine o'clock, fearing to faint, he left the church. "Ah! poor Benedict!" cried aloud a poor woman, "he is very ill to-day!"

He had scarcely reached the porch of the church, when he fell senseless upon the steps. A sympathetic group gathered round him, some offering wine, others delicate food, some a shelter at their homes, whilst a few spoke of taking him to a hospital.

Benedict, in a weak voice, thanked them all for their kindness, but refused to go far from the church. He requested them to give him a little cold water, "undoubtedly not daring," says his Italian

biographer, "to ask for vinegar in order to imitate his crucified Lord."

Father Melis happened to pass at that moment, and on beholding Benedict he exclaimed: "There is that obstinate young man, who does not wish to go to the hospital. He will surely die in the street, as has been predicted." Benedict Joseph heard these words, which were dictated by the great interest the holy priest took in him. He did not answer, but his lips parted in a sweet smile.

The group that had gathered round the dying beggar, continued to increase. Zaccarelli, who had just left his parish church, Il Salvatorello, where he had made his Easter duty, approached to see the cause of the gathering. Recognizing Benedict, who was stretched upon the church steps, his head resting upon his hands and almost dying, he called him most affectionately by his name, and offered to take him to his home. Hearing the familiar voice of his friend, Benedict turned his expressive eyes upon him, and said: "To your home?" "Yes, to my home," answered the pious man." "I would like to go very much," replied the saint. Zaccarelli immediately raised him up, and with the assistance of a person called Bernard, he was enabled to make him walk a few steps. But Benedict's strength was all gone; he could not move, and they were obliged to let him rest upon the door-steps of a neighboring house.

Zaccarelli, seeing his son, Peter Paul, on the corner of the street, called him, and confiding his precious

charge to his care, went on ahead to prepare a room in his house for his dying friend.

Peter Paul, and another young man, the son of a druggist, conducted him to Zaccarelli's house.

After a deal of trouble they reached the house, which was situated as we know, a short distance from Santa Mari dei Monti. Benedict was exhausted and his limbs refused to support him. Peter Paul, who was young and strong, took him up in his arms and carried him. He was surprised to find his burden so light, and in fact, Benedict weighed no more than a child.

They passed through a room in which Mrs. Zaccarelli had been sick in bed for a month. On seeing Benedict so very pale, she exclaimed: "My poor Benedict, you are very ill!" When they had reached the next room, the same in which Benedict had visited Fortune, when he was sick, and in which Anne had prepared a bed to receive the dying beggar, Peter Paul placed his poor friend upon a seat. They wished to put him to bed, but Benedict objected and begged them to place him on the floor. His modesty commenced to be alarmed. He feared they would deprive him of his miserable rags, but when they promised not to touch them, he consented to be placed upon the bed. It was then just ten o'clock. Zaccarelli very prudently sent for a priest, although he did not consider Benedict in danger of death. Whilst his children thought only of relieving the body, he, as all true Christians should do in similiar cases, thought

of the soul. Father Piccilli had just left the confessional; he hastened to Zaccarelli's house without even taking off his cassock. "My dear Benedict," said he to the dying man, "do you need anything?" "Nothing, nothing," answered Benedict.

On feeling his pulse, the priest saw that he had but a short time to live. Then he asked him: "How long is it since you received Holy Communion?" "But a short time," answered Benedict in such a weak voice, that he could scarcely be heard. His lips and teeth were tightly closed, and he moaned, as though suffering intensely. The good people did all in their power to relieve and strengthen him. When they touched his lips with a piece of cotton moistened with sweetened water, he opened his mouth and presented his tongue as though to receive Holy Communion. When spoken to, he seemed to hear nothing, and to be quite unconscious.

"There is no time to be lost," said Father Piccilli, "all this man needs now, is Extreme Unction and the assistance given to the dying."

But Zaccarelli had already gone to the chuch of Il Salvatorello, and soon returned with Father Giordani, who spoke a few words to the dying man, but received no answer. The agony then commenced. He kept his hands folded on his breast in the form of a cross; he breathed softly, and had it not been for a slight tremor that occasionally passed over his body, one would have thought he had ceased to live. Father Giordani thought it prudent to give him Extreme Unc-

tion, and in presence of a quite large number of persons, he anointed the mendicant's body with the holy oils. A few moments later, one of the religious came to assist Benedict in his last moments with his care and prayers. This pious and touching custom probably exists only in Rome. When a person commences his agony, when that terrible moment has come, which is to decide his fate for eternity, a priest remains near his bed, so as to profit by every moment of consciousness, to encourage and enliven the dying person's faith.

The modest chamber in which Benedict was laid, was soon filled with people. The news that the holy beggar who frequented dei Monti was dying, rapidly spread throughout that quarter, and every one desirous to assist at the last moments of a saint, hastened to Zaccarelli's house. Benedict, whose eyes were closed, seemed to have fallen into a deep and peaceful sleep. Some of those present prayed in silence, others spoke in whispers of the virtues of the dying man, or related the hardships of his life. Occasionally a deep sigh escaped from Benedict's breast. He rapidly lost strength. From time to time, the devoted religious who watched by his bedside, pressed the crucifix to his lips. But Benedict seemed to be insensible to all outward things. Undoubtedly he was already enjoying the glory and beauty of Jesus.

After sunset the faint moaning ceased, and his pulse almost stopped beating. "Let us recite the Litany of the Blessed Virgin," said the religious ad-

dressing those present. They all knelt down, Zaccarelli and his two sons being at the foot of the bed. Father Ange commenced the prayers, and when he had reached the invocation "*Sancta Maria*," the dying man's face became as white as snow. "*Ora pro nobis*," answered the assistants.

But Father Ange did not continue the litany; he arose, leaned over Benedict, then turning towards those present he said: "He has passed away!" after which he closed the saint's eyes and mouth. It was then eight o'clock. All the bells of Rome were ringing the Salve Regina, which had been ordered by Pius VI., so that, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, God would calm the tempest which was raging around the Bark of Peter. But in Zaccarelli's thoughts, as well as in those of his family, they were proclaiming to the world that a new saint had entered heaven.

A person by the name of Rinaldi, who greatly admired Benedict, had often said: "When he dies, the bells will ring." On hearing them on the Wednesday evening of Holy Week, in the year 1783, he expected the death of the pious servant of God, and exclaimed: "It must be that Benedict is dead!"

At Loreto, Gaudentius and his wife were expecting Benedict; they often spoke of him, and were happy to think he would soon be with them. As Lent was drawing to a close, they knew he would not tarry. Gaudentius never left his house without looking in all directions to see if he could not perceive his friend

coming, and he often went to the Basilica, and asked those he met if they had not seen him.

On the evening that Benedict died, Gaudentius and his wife were sitting before the open fire-place; they quietly conversed about their absent friend, their beloved Benedict, whom they hoped to see ere long. Their little son Joseph, who was five years old, came up to them suddenly and said: "Benedict will not come; Benedict is going to die!" They paid no attention whatever to these words, and continued their conversation. They thought that, as the roads were in a very bad condition, he might have gone astray, or else being surprised by illness on the route, had taken refuge in some hospital. Little Joseph again spoke, saying: "Benedict is not sick in an hospital; he will not come, for he is dying!" As before, Gaudentius and his wife, took no notice of what the child said. The next day, when speaking of the previous year, they remembered that on such a day, Benedict was with them in their house. They spoke of preparing his room, and putting every thing in order. "Do not expect him," said the child. "Have I not told you that he will not come? Benedict is dead,—Benedict has gone to heaven!"

The mother began to be alarmed. "How do you know all this?" inquired she of her little son. "My heart tells me so," answered the child. That same evening, to try Joseph, she said: "Baby, Benedict has come." But little Joseph immediately answered: "Have I not told you that Benedict is dead, and has

gone to heaven?" Seeing so much firmness in the child, Gaudentius and his wife remarked, that God often loosens the tongues of little children, and renders them eloquent. They then awaited news from Rome more impatiently than before. Holy Week passed away, and no one could say what had become of Benedict. Finally, on the eve of Low Sunday, a Corsican soldier, meeting Gaudentius, showed him a letter that he had just received from Rome, and which contained the sad news of Benedict's death. "Then Joseph was not mistaken!" said Gaudentius, who returned to his home, with a sorrowful heart, repeating his little son's words: "Benedict will not return; Benedict has gone to heaven!"

When Benedict had thus given up his beautiful soul to God, Zaccarelli hastened to attend to the last requirements of the holy body. He divested it of its soiled and ragged garments, which he replaced with linen ones. He wrapped it in a white cloak, the distinguishing mark of the association of "Our Lady of the Snow," in whose ranks Benedict had but lately been enrolled at the request of Peter Paul, then, with great tenderness, Zaccarelli laid the dead body of his beloved friend upon the bed. His miserable clothing was put away most carefully. A few pieces were already missing, which had been taken undoubtedly by some pious persons. His breviary, rosary, crucifix, his papers, and even the remainder of a lemon and a crust of hard bread found in his pockets, were laid away, as though they were the most precious treasures.

In the meanwhile, a band of little children, prompted by a superior power, ran through the streets crying out: "The saint is dead! the saint is dead!" They went through the different quarters of the city, repeating the same words: "The saint is dead! the saint is dead!"

On hearing these words, every one inquired who was this saint. Some said: "The poor man of the Forty Hours Adoration," and others: "The new Alexius, the beggar of Santa Maria dei Monti." They hastened to once more look upon the sweet face which they had so many times compared to that of Our Savior.

The house was besieged; to restrain the crowd, Zaccarelli was obliged to place Corsican sentinels before the front door and chamber in which the saint was exposed. The visitors knelt before the holy mendicant, recited prayers, kissed his feet, and were amazed on beholding the large warts on his knees which, during his long hours of adoration, must have caused him excruciating pains. The body was not yet cold, and the flesh, instead of being stiffened by death, was soft and flexible to the touch, as though he were yet alive. His corpse did not inspire fear or horror. An atmosphere of peace and happiness seemed to surround Benedict Joseph, which filled the souls of the visitors with sweet consolation. Several among them, opening their lips to recite the *De profundis*, could only murmur the *Gloria Patri*. Eight months before his death, Benedict Joseph greatly

troubled, spoke to Father Marconi as follows: "I have been permitted to see my own funeral, and a vast concourse of people pay homage to my miserable body. The Blessed Sacrament was not in the church, and all the marks of respect and veneration due to the Holy Eucharist were given to my body."

On the following day, the people continued to flock to Zaccarelli's house, and persons from the most distant quarters of the city went to look upon the face of the saint.

Father Melis, notwithstanding his advanced age, hastened to pay the last tribute of friendship to his former friend, and, when he beheld him silent in death, he could not restrain his tears, and kissed him most respectfully on the forehead.

The crowd was immense, and the sentinels lost all control over the enthusiastic populace, desirous to look upon the saint for the last time. Anne Zaccarelli and her mother knew not how to repress these people, who continued to fill the house. They were nearly distracted.

According to the custom in Rome, a little before sundown, the body was carried from the house to the burial place, Santa Maria dei Monti, which had been chosen by the people as a fitting tomb for the holy mendicant. When the funeral procession appeared, a great shout went up from the throng: "The saint is dead! the saint is dead!" The distance from Zaccarelli's to dei Monti was short, and the procession advanced slowly. "How beautiful he is, O, blessed Benedict!

He is truly a saint!" shouted the crowd. The enthusiasm of the people cannot be described. It was not a funeral procession, but a real ovation. The little children ran ahead repeating the inspired cry: "The saint is dead! The saint is dead!" In the midst of these acclamations, the body was placed in an oratory adjoining the vestry where the Blessed Sacrament was kept during the last days of Lent.

On the following day, long before the doors were opened, an immense crowd of people surrounded the church, asking to see the saint.

It was in vain that the Father Rector requested them to be silent, through respect for the Blessed Sacrament, which was in the chapel where Benedict's body was exposed. But they delighted in praising his virtues, in relating his penances and humiliations, and in proclaiming his eminent holiness. The chapel was evidently too small to contain the ever increasing throng. They were compelled to carry the body into the nave of the church and delay the funeral, in order to give every one the opportunity of gratifying his devotion. In a short time the church itself was too small, and they were obliged to place armed guards at the doors, and around the bier, striving to keep the crowd moving. It was very hard to control the enthusiastic spectators, who climbed upon the altars and confessionals, and stood up in the pews, so as to catch a glimpse of the saint. They scattered flowers over his body, which were quickly taken by those nearest the bier and carried off as relics. But

none thought of praying for the repose of his soul.

Among those who visited the church during the four days that the saint's body was exposed, were Father Fraja, who came to kiss his friend's feet without fearing this time to alarm his humility; the good Cremaschi who came to bid a final adieu to *il signore Benedetto*, and Father Marconi, who remained by the body of his glorious penitent until the last moment. Priests, religious, nobles, soldiers, ladies of high station, cardinals, superiors of religious orders, all vied with one another in paying homage to the French mendicant. Princess Eleanora Rospigliosi, Marchioness Vitelleschi, the Duchess de Poli, Bishop de la Somaglia, Prince Pallaviccini, Bishop de Salm, the German prelate of the Rota, jostled against the shoemaker Rick, the butcher Zaccarelli, and his wife who was miraculously cured of her sickness, Father Marconi, the pious Mary Poeti, and Leo Clavelli, keeper of St. Martin's hospital.

Evidently the hand of God guided the throng to this humble bier, that all might honor the beggar, who yesterday, was unknown to the greater number of them, but who to-day, is glorified throughout Rome. How can the funerals of great captains and august emperors compare with this one where nothing is official and the marks of respect spring spontaneously from the heart?

Resembling that of the Prophet, Benedict's tomb became glorious; his limbs remained flexible, and

occasionally abundant perspiration covered his body, which seemed to possess the virtue of healing the sick and disseminating innumerable blessings among the faithful. The report of these wonders spread throughout the city, like wildfire, and greatly increased the enthusiasm of the populace. The streets were crowded, and a large concourse of people pressed towards dei Monti, to the little room on dei Serpenti Street where the saint died, towards St. Martin's hospital, in fact, toward all those places which the saint had frequented during his holy life.

Easter was the day fixed for the burial of Benedict Joseph. The crowd was greater than ever, and surpassed anything of the preceeding days. Not only did the residents of the city gather in Santi Maria dei Monti to honor the holy mendicant, but the country people were also attracted toward the saint's coffin. The church was literally crowded; it was impossible to sing mass, or to celebrate any office. The crowd prayed, wept and praised the virtues of the holy beggar. It was thought prudent to leave the Blessed Sacrament in the Sacristy, thus Benedict's prediction, to Father Marconi was fulfilled.

On the evening of the fourth day, his body was still flexible, and there was not the slightest trace of decomposition. The people never wearied looking at him, and when he was wrapped in his shroud, and laid in his coffin, the crowd begged to look upon the saint once more.

The grave was ready; it had been dug Saturday

night, on the Epistle side of the high altar. Benedict's body was finally placed in it, amidst the acclamations of the people. And in the streets, the children continued to repeat the cry: "The saint is dead! the saint is dead!"

CHAPTER XIV.

EPILOGUE.

I HAVE have read in an ancient author that many inhabitants of a certain country, filled with admiration for an illustrious saint whose life he relates, followed the paths through which he had wandered in life, distributing abundant alms among the poor, and endeavoring to find traces of his footsteps on which to place the feet of their sick. A gentle warmth emanating from these sacred footprints, gave life and health.

This is a beautiful example of faith which our society of the present day would do well to imitate, in regard to the ashes of our martyrs and confessors; for that society contaminated by the evils of atheism and ungovernable independence, is in need of an efficacious remedy.

When I went to Rome to see the great Pontiff, who for more than a quarter of a century held the Revolution in check, I wished, like those people of former times, to seek for traces of the mendicant, whose life I have endeavored to sketch, and who protected me in

a special manner during my peregrinations throughout Italy.

On Wednesday, September 29th, 1875, the sun was shining brightly, and not a cloud was visible in the blue firmanent. "*Chiese della Madonna dei Monti*," I shouted to one of numerous conduttori stationed on the Piazza du Capitole. A few moments later, we reached the spot which still carefully preserves Benedict's memory, and which was his favorite resort. In this quarter, the streets are gloomy, the houses exceedingly plain, and the people seen on the streets are only poor workmen going to their workshops, or ragged women, asking for alms. It is evidently the quarter of the city where the poor reside, and we can easily understand why Benedict, who loved proverty so passionately, should choose it in preference to all other places.

In a few moments we reached the Church of Santa Maria dei Monti, which was formerly a part of the Holy Redeemer's parish, but is now a parish by itself.

This church which was built on the site between the Quirinal, Viminal and Esquiline, three of the famous hills of ancient Rome, dates only from the fifteenth century; Gregory VIII. built it in honor of a miraculous image of the Mother of God, which had been found in a hay market, and it is greatly respected and venerated by the people.

Santa Maria dei Monti is not very attractive to the artist or antiquarian, and it is one of the few churches, before which the traveler passes without stopping.

Yet, I must confess, that the very moment I placed my foot upon the threshold of this sanctuary, I experienced sentiments of piety and respect such as I had never felt elsewhere. There heaven appeared more accessible. God seemed nearer, and the air more fragrant with the sweetest perfume.

Besides was it not here that Benedict Joseph wept and prayed? Had not his angelic purity sanctified the very stones themselves, and given them a special virtue, that of attracting hearts to God?

It was here that the saint received the Bread of Angels with such extraordinary love and piety. Here that he remained hour after hour contemplating God. My imagination never wearied recalling these scenes, which alas! have vanished.

An altar had been erected in his honor. It is the first to the left of the nave, on the Gospel side, and is very plain—almost poor.

While all the other shrines of Rome are profusely and artistically adorned with gold, marble, precious stones and metals, this one is humble and unadorned. It would seem as though people feared to surround his mortal remains with anything resembling pomp or splendor. Or, perhaps did they wish Benedict even from his tomb to continue to preach silently these eloquent and salutary lessons, which he taught in his life to his contemporaries concerning the vanities of the world.

A mysterious light is shed from the altar; the whole world seems gathered in a ray of sunshine,

and we find ourselves wondering how small and contemptible are earthly things, compared to those of heaven. Over the altar hangs a beautiful painting, representing Benedict Joseph in the act of distributing alms, in the Coliseum, to those poorer than himself, or less resigned to their destitute condition. The saint is standing, and his countenance is brightened by a soft light; with one hand he points to heaven, as though elevating to God the hearts of those beside him, and undoubtedly the words that fall from his parted lips are in harmony with the gesture. With the other hand, he offers a bowl of food to a ragged old man, crouched at his feet. Not far from the old man is a pale little girl, who, with her beautiful white teeth, is biting into a piece of bread, just given her by Benedict. Above his picture, which contains many good lessons, are two angels, with outspread wings, holding a crown of flowers over the saint's head.

I know of nothing more exquisite than this painting, unless it is the one representing St. Germain Consin holding her apron open before her cruel stepmother, who finds beautiful roses instead of the bread which Germain was about to distribute among the poor.

To the right and left of the altar, are a number of *ex-votos* suspended from the wall in acknowledgment of favors obtained through Benedict's intercession. There are hearts of silver that speak of the love the grateful Romans have for this saint; small engravings which recall, in a simple way, some touching scene,

where Benedict Joseph manifested his power when invoked. I noticed one of these in particular. It was a laborer who, having fallen from the roof of a house to the pavement below, implored Benedict, and escaped without serious injury. Over the picture we read these simple but eloquent words: "A miracle recently granted to Mathew Frafini, on the 21st of April, 1861, by the Blessed Benedict Joseph Labre, in the theatre Alibert."

We have already mentioned the fact that Benedict Joseph's body was laid on the Epistle side of the high altar, not far from the railing. It remained in this place seventy-seven years. On a marble slab erected over his former resting place, we read the following inscription: "It was here that for seventy-seven years the body of B. Benedict Joseph Labre rested."

In 1860, Pius IX., having declared the illustrious mendicant *Blessed*, his bones were removed, amidst the greatest pomp, to the altar which had been raised in his honor, by the piety of the faithful. It is there that they rest at the present day, receiving the homage of Christians, while awaiting the day of Resurrection.

The visitor's eye is attracted by a wax figure of the saint, which is on one side of the altar. It faithfully depicts Benedict as he appeared in life, with his dark cloak, ragged garments, his breast uncovered, a rosary hanging around his neck, and sandals on his feet. For the first time his discipline lies idle by his side. His arms are crossed on his breast, as at the hour of his death. In his right hand he holds a lily,

emblem of the purity he preserved intact during his life. One would think him sleeping, but about to awake, and tearfully complain of the honor paid his miserable body. Fearing to disturb his peaceful sleep, the visitor scarcely dares to breathe, and endeavors to gather thoughts of virtue and wisdom from his ashes.

I reluctantly tore myself away from this spot, around which clings so many holy memories. But time was flying rapidly, and we were anxious to visit the house in which Benedict had given up his beautiful soul to God.

As our readers will remember, this house is but a short distance from the Church of Santa Maria dei Monti, at No. 13 dei Serpenti street. The pious Zaccarelli family were no longer there, but the ground floor was still occupied by a butcher's stall. The tenants made it a point of honor to take the greatest care of the staircase up which young Zaccarelli carried Benedict when dying, and of the room in which the saint breathed his last sigh.

The mistress of the house was very kind and obliging; she guided us through the house and willingly answered all our questions.

As we ascended the stairs which led to the upper story, I was deeply moved when thinking that almost one hundred years previously, Benedict had been carried up over these same stairs, on the morning of his death. The first room we entered, was the one in which Mrs. Zaccarelli, sick in bed and suffering

intense pain, was filled with compassion on beholding Benedict in a dying condition. A coarse bust in plaster, representing Benedict Joseph in his well-known costume, is the only ornament of this room. We hastened to enter the adjoining chamber, which is the one in which the holy mendicant fell asleep in the Lord. It has been converted into an oratory, where pious Christians go to pray; occasionally the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered there, for the Romans, better than any other people, know how to surround with respect that which recalls some holy reminiscence.

This then, is the place where Benedict died! The bed has disappeared, and is replaced by an altar, inclosed by a wooden railing. Pious people keep lamps burning on the altar steps day and night. "Blessed are they that die in the Lord!" said one of my friends. These were, in fact, the only words that our lips could utter in that humble dwelling; "happy are those who die in the Lord!"

Several rude paintings adorn the walls of this sanctuary. They all represented some feature in Benedict's life. In one, the servant of God falls down in the street from inanition; among the many who gather round him is Zaccarelli; and a woman rushes through the crowd, bringing a cordial for the exhausted youth. In another, a priest, probably good Father Melis, offers him a shelter in his home, which Benedict refuses, but the saint accepts an invitation to Zaccarelli's home. Here, Benedict, with his breviary on the railing, is kneeling before the altar of Our Lady.

There, on the eve of his departure for Loreto, Benedict is offered a pair of shoes by young Zaccarelli. "They are too good," says the pious mendicant. In another, Zaccarelli aided by a peddler named Bernard, raises up Benedict from the ground in a dying condition, and endeavors to conduct him to his home.

Of course there is nothing like art in these miserable paintings. Yet they inspire a sentiment of respect; the same which compels a man to stop before paintings or memorials that recall the achievements of his ancestors.

The sun had already reached the horizon, and the nighboring houses were enveloped in its parting rays, as in a beautiful mantle of transparent purple. I cast a last glance at the little chapel, as if to impress every detail upon my memory. Then we returned, conversing on the wonderful things we had seen, and imparting to each other the various impressions which filled our souls.

The same thought occupied our minds, and we asked each other how soon would the grand solemnity of the canonization of Benedict Joseph Labre take place? Would it be the signal for the resurrection of France and the deliverance of the Church?

Notwithstanding the sad state of things at the present day, and the dark forebodings for the future, relying on God, we agreed to make the Vatican Basilica our meeting place, whenever that great feast would take place.

Oh! Blessed Benedict, when thy beatification was

joyfully celebrated in the grand Basilica of St. Peter's, and in the humble church of Santa Maria dei Monti, thy votaries offered thee, the following prayer, which is yet inscribed in the Sacristy dei Monti: "*Benedicte Joseph, si tibi splendido cultu ædem hanc ornamus quæ te fundentem preces et divino epulo refectum vidit tuaque sacra ossa servat, tu nobis dexter adsis nostrosque animos à cadusis ad æterna traducas.*"

"Joseph if, in thy honor we have magnificently adorned this sanctuary, which witnessed thy communions and thy ardent prayers, and which is now the reliquary of thy mortal remains, be propitious unto us; turn our hearts from the perishable goods of this world, and make them desire only the things of Heaven."

In concluding these pages, which will always recall the happiest hours of my life, I wish to offer thee this same prayer: "O Joseph, I have endeavored to relate your life which is so full of good works and generous examples. I must confess, that very often, my pen has refused to describe the feelings of my heart, and I am aware that this work is very deficient in merit. Notwithstanding its imperfections, deign to accept it as a small token of my affection and gratitude towards thee. And in return, be propitious unto me! Bless me; bless my relatives; bless my friends; turn our hearts from the fleeting and perishable goods of this earth, and make us seek only the stable and eternal things of heaven.

"I hope soon to seek your traces in Rome, which city,

at the present day attracts every true catholic soul, and especially every truely sacerdotal soul, and when I do find them, make me taste the same sweet joy I have tasted in your company.

"May God then clear away all those obstacles to the grand ceremony of thy canonization caused by the revolutionary spirit in the Eternal City.

"I hope for it, through thy powerful intercession.

"Saint Benedict Joseph Labre, *pray for us.*"

ADDENDA.

Abbé Solassol's Life of the Holy Mendicant finishes with these pages; but the translator thought the following notes, drawn from reliable sources, would be highly interesting to all American readers.

MIRACLES AND CONVERSIONS.

AFTER the death of the Holy Mendicant, many wonderful events took place, which proved him to be a great saint.

God wrought numerous miracles through the intercession of Benedict Joseph, so many, in fact, that in less than three months after his death, the books at Santa Maria dei Monti, recorded one hundred and thirty-six attested supernatural facts, which had been carefully investigated by the postulator and his assessors.

These extraordinary occurrences created great excitement in the Eternal City, and they were the topic of conversation everywhere. Even the heretics and freethinkers commented upon them, but not from a religious point of view. On the contrary, they scorned and derided the idea that a dead beggar could work such wonders, and they pitied the poor people who were credulous enough to put faith in them.

There was a certain café in Rome, frequented by a number of protestants, who seemed to take delight in passing unbecoming and disrespectful remarks on the

saint, his peculiar habits when living, and the stir his death had caused in Rome.

Among those was an American protestant minister, a native of Boston, who was more bitter than the others in the expression of his opinions. This gentleman had gone to Europe with the intention of mastering the different languages, and studying the manners and customs of the principal nations.

He remained ten months in Paris, during which time he fell seriously ill, and manifested his hostility to the Catholic religion, by closing his doors to all the priests that might have been tempted to call on him.

He recovered, however, and went to England, where he remained three months studying the constitution of the kingdom. Thence he proceeded to Rome, greatly prejudiced against our holy religion and the Italian people.

Fortunately, his ideas were to a certain degree modified by friendly intercourse with a few Italian gentlemen whom he met during his travels.

He resolved to be instructed in the Catholic religion, not because he had the slightest intention of joining the Church, but for the same reason that he would have studied the religion of Mahomet, had he been at Constantinople.

Accordingly, he discussed the various points of religion with several distinguished priests, and, although convinced of its truth, he was not courageous enough to face the reproaches of his family, and the criticisms of the world.

It was Blessed Benedict Joseph Labre, who brought peace and quiet to this storm-tossed soul.

As miracle after miracle took place in quick succession, Mr. Thayer thought he would investigate them. He therefore addressed himself to Father Marconi, who had been Benedict's confessor, and spoke to him as follows: "I have heard many things about this man, but I fear, as often happens, all is due to the credulity and imagination of ignorant people. I am not a Catholic, but I will believe you if you will sincerely and truthfully tell me all you known about him as his spiritual director? Can it be possible for a Christian to lead such an abject and miserable life, and delight in sufferings and humiliations?"

Father Marconi proved to him, by the recital of several facts, that Benedict's thirsts for mortifications was real, and that it proceeded from the great contempt he felt for himself. Then he advised Mr. Thayer to visit a few of those persons, who had been miraculously cured through the intercession of Benedict Joseph. He mentioned Angela Zanchi, who suffering from paralysis, was completely restored to health. The protestant minister went to see her, listened to her narrative, and separately questioned her physician and several witnesses. He finally returned to Father Marconi and told him that he believed in that miracle, but would like to inquire into one more.

To satisfy him, the good priest gave him two addresses instead of one, those of Octavia Vergari and Clementina Cicconetti, who had both been cured at

Benedict's tomb. The protestant acknowledged to Father Marconi, that, according to him, these were two real miracles. But as a further proof, the priest told him to examine a fourth miraculous cure, that of Sister Brenna.

Mr. Thayer went directly to St. Appolinia's Convent, where he questioned the superior and six other nuns. They all agreed as to the incurable nature of the disease which had afflicted their sister, and concurred in saying that the cure was instantaneous. For four months he visited the convent, in order to be sure that the religious had been permanently cured.

After such a thorough investigation of the four miracles he could no longer refuse to believe the truths of the Catholic Church, and after a few more struggles, he resolved to renounce error, and become a true follower of Christ Jesus.

He repaired to the café, where he declared his belief in the miracles performed by Benedict Joseph Labre, and to show that he was not ashamed of his faith in the saint, he invited his protestant friends to be present at his abjuration.

Having become a Catholic, he resolved to be a missionary priest; and for this purpose, he went to Paris, and commenced his theological studies in the Sulpician Seminary.

Wherever he went, he sang the praises of the mendicant saint, to whom, after God and his Blessed Mother, he considered he owed his conversion.

In 1786, an American soldier, traveling through

France, received the gift of faith at Cambray; he wrote a letter requesting Mr. Thayer, as a compatriot, to become his sponsor; the latter accepted, and made the journey on foot, so as to resemble in something Benedict Joseph Labre.

On the first of May, 1787, while yet at the seminary, he wrote a long letter to his brother Nathaniel, living at Boston, and had it afterwards published, in answer to the objections made by Nathaniel to his conversion.

Having been ordained priest in the same year, he made several long journeys to London, where he was the author of many remarkable conversions.

Later on, he spent a whole year in London, choosing for his place of residence the dingiest quarter of the city. Here he gathered the poor and beggars around him, and spoke to them of God in an abandoned manufactory, which served them as a church. He worked wonders among these miserable people, and brought many lost sheep back into our Savior's fold.

During one of Father Thayer's journeys, he stopped at Boulogne-sur-Mer, and offered Holy Mass at the Ursuline Convent; he prevailed upon two of the religious to sever every link that bound them to their native home, and follow him to America, to devote themselves to the conversion of the New World.

He arrived at Baltimore in 1790, and accompanied the first Bishop of that See, Mgr. Carroll. Subse-

quently he visited his relatives in Boston, who gave him a very warm welcome.

At this time, there were no more than one hundred Catholics in that city, but thanks to the zeal of the new missionary, the Church soon flourished, and in a few years became an Episcopal See.

Father Thayer assisted at the Synod held at Baltimore in 1791, under Bishop Carroll, and in 1816, he died at Limerick, Ireland.

He was not the only heritic converted to the faith by the miracles and examples of Benedict Joseph.

In Father Marconi's correspondence, there is ample proof that even protestant countries were greatly impressed by the wonderful virtues of this holy servant of God.

CANONIZATION

OF

BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE, BAPTIST OF ROSSI, LAWRENCE OF BRINDISI, AND CLARA OF THE CROSS.

FTER long years of prayer and careful inquiry, the ceremony of the beatification of Benedict Joseph Labre took place, May 20th, 1860, in St. Peter's, which was ablaze with over four thousand lights.

Twenty-one years later, the canonization of our saint was celebrated by His Holiness Leo XIII., on December 8th, 1881, the beautiful feast of the Immaculate Conception.

A few details of this great solemnity may gratify our readers.

The Holy Father left his apartments at 9 o'clock in the morning, and proceeded to the hall *Paramenti*, adjoining the *Sala Ducale*, where the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops awaited him.

After having put on the sacred vestments and placed the tiara upon his head, His Holiness entered the *Sala Ducale* where he prayed in silence for a few

moments, blessed the incense, then intoned the *Ave Maris Stella.*

After the first stanza of the hymn had been sung, the Sovereign Pontiff seated himself on the *sedia gestatoria.* Cardinal Bartolini offered him three lighted candles which were beautifully decorated with delicate paintings. The Pope kept the smallest one, which he held in his left hand covered with a white silk veil, whilst his right hand was free to give the Papal Benediction.

The procession formed and then moved toward the Sixtine Chapel, where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. When the chanters had finished the last stanza of the hymn, the Holy Father left the *sedia* and adored the Sacred Host.

It was ten o'clock when the pontificial cortege entered the *Loggia* where, after the conclusion of the rites peculiar to canonization, the Vicar of Jesus Christ pronounced Benedict Joseph Labre a *Saint.* At the same moment, the celebrated silver trumpets of St. Peter's proclaimed the good tidings, whilst the bells of the entire city rang in response to those of the grand Basilica. In former days the cannons of Castle S. Angelo added lustre to these joyful celebrations, but on this occasion they were silent, for the Holy Father no longer governed the Eternal City.

After the *Te Deum* had been sung, one of the Cardinal-deacons recited the invocations to the new saints and the Sovereign Pontiff chanted the prayers dedicated to them.

The ceremony of the canonization being concluded, the Pontificial High Mass was sung. Immediately after the *Credo* the postulator of each cause presented their oblations, which consisted in five candles, two loaves of bread, two small barrels of wine and water, three cages containing turtle-doves, pigeons and a variety of other birds. It was customary at St. Peter's to set these little captives free; but the chapel, being too small, this simple and touching ceremony could not be observed.

It was the Bishop of Arras who presented St. Benedict Joseph's oblations, and it is said the Holy Father smilingly remarked that the blessed mendicant's offerings were the richest. He affectionately laid his hand upon the head of the pastor of Amette, who was one of the oblationers.

At the end of Mass the Pope resumed his place in the *sedia gestatoria* and returned to his apartments, blessing all on his way.

The immense and enthusiastic crowd that had gathered on the Piazza di S. Pietro, quietly dispersed, thanking God for having given the Church four such great saints.

THE HISTORY

OF THE

Conversion of Rev. John Thayer.

(RELATED BY HIMSELF.)

THE public papers have already announced the conversion of a Protestant minister, wrought at Rome at the time of the miracles of the Venerable Labre. I am that Protestant converted to the faith; and being led to it by a very special Providence, like the blind man in the Gospel miraculously healed, it gives me pleasure, and I think it my duty, to publish the goodness of a bountiful God, to whom I am indebted for the light and life of grace.

I was born in Boston, of a family in easy circumstances. I was brought up there in the Protestant religion, the only prevailing, and almost the only one known in New England. At first, I had refused to study, but at the age of sixteen, by reflection, and a certain desire of improvement, I entreated my parents to send me to school. By dint of application I repaired lost time, and, by the help of a good teacher, made tolerably rapid progress. At the conclusion of my stud-

ies, I was made a minister of the Puritan sect, and exercised my functions for two years, applying myself to the study of Holy Scripture and to preaching. In the meantime, I felt a secret inclination to travel ; I nourished the desire, and formed a resolution of passing into Europe to learn the languages which are more in use, and to acquire a knowledge of the constitution of states, of the manners, customs, laws, government of the principle nations, in order to acquire by this political knowledge, a greater consequence in my own country, and thus to become more useful to it. Such were my human views, without the least suspicion of the secret designs of Providence, which was preparing for me more precious advantages.

I embarked for Europe, and arrived in France at the end of the year 1781. I remained there ten months, totally taken up in studying the language, in reading the best authors, and in instructing myself in the principles of the government. I was there attacked with a fit of illness, and as I feared that it would be attended with serious consequences, my first concern was to forbid that any Catholic priest should be suffered to come near me ; such was my attachment to my own sect. After my recovery, I spent three months in England, attentive, as in France, in observing the manners and customs of the country. I was desired to preach ; I complied ; but it being observed that my doctrine did not agree with that of the persons before whom I spoke, I replied that I had taken it from the Gospel. It is on this that all the sects, however opposite to

each other, establish their various systems ; a striking proof of the necessity of a living authority to fix its true sense. I returned to France with the intention of passing thence to Rome, constantly bent on the same pursuits ; and, as it may easily be imagined, strongly prejudiced both against the nation and religion of that country, which had been represented to me in the most odious colors. However, during my stay in France I had formed a more favorable idea of the Catholic religion, and my intercourse with the Italians contributed also to remove my prejudices.

In our passage from Marseilles to Rome we were becalmed, and obliged to stop some days at a little port called Port Ercole. The Marquis D'Elmoro, a respectable old gentleman, received me without any recommendations to him, and treated me with the kindness and affection of a father ; his house, his table, his library, were at my service; and when we parted, he made me promise to correspond with him, I had the happiness wherever I went, to meet with Italians of the same character ; and all with whom I have been concerned have shown the same eagerness to oblige me, especially the worthy and virtuous family in which I lodged at Rome, and in which I found myself as in the centre of my own family. Such goodness, such cordiality to a stranger, to an avowed Protestant, at once touched and surprised me. This religion, said I, is not, then, so unsociable, and does not as I have been told, inspire sentiments of aversion and intolerancy to those of a different persuasion.

Thus, from day to day, I condemned the unjust prejudices which had been suggested to me, and God disposed matters at a distance to bring me insensibly to the happy term at which I have arrived. My first concern at Rome was to visit the most celebrated masterpieces and monuments of antiquity, which attract the notice of strangers; among others, the Rotunda or Pantheon, a temple formerly consecrated to the worship of all the false deities of paganism, but at present dedicated to the honor of the Blessed Virgin and of all the saints. At the sight of this superb edifice I was struck with an idea which appeared to me sublime, and which I thought might furnish the subject of an eloquent discourse, if the Catholic religion were true.

The following is, in substance, the idea which occurred to me at that time: "This temple, formerly consecrated to the worship of false gods, now become the temple of the true God; the Cross of Jesus Christ, raised on the wrecks of the idols, collected to form, as it were, a more glorious trophy, and then exhibited to the whole world; this city, formerly the mistress of the universe, and the capital of the pagan world, now become the capital of the Christian world; these, I say, are living and lasting monuments of the triumphs of Jesus Christ over the *strong-armed*, and of the establishment of His empire upon the ruins of that of Satan. Yes; it was worthy of God to make the centre of idolatry the centre of the true faith; the first city in the world the capital of His kingdom;

in short, this famous school of all arts, this celebrated city, which draws the attention of curious and strangers from all parts of the world; the school of truth, and the common centre of union among all those who believe in Jesus Christ; then nothing would be wanting to the exterior glory of His religion, and to the visibility of His Church, which He undoubtedly intended to exhibit to the eyes of all mankind; it would then be truly a *city built upon a mountain*, so exposed to the sight of all the world that it could not be concealed." This idea pleased me much; and as I was fond of the eloquence of the pulpit, I wished it were true, to be able to treat so beautiful a subject. This first ray of light should have led me farther; but as yet it was no more in my eyes than a pleasing fancy, which I relinquished to attend to the purposes I had formed.

I learned Italian much sooner and with much more facility than French, and in a short time was able to read the best authors in that language. According to my intention, I studied at the same time the constitution and actual state of Rome. From time to time, however, the Catholic religion returned to my mind; and, although it made no part of my plan of studies, I was desirous nevertheless of instructing myself thoroughly in its principles during my stay in that city, for the same reason that I should have wished to know the religion of Mahomet had I been at Constantinople. I was far from suspecting that my own was false, or at least, from thinking of embracing another;

I only wished to know the doctrine of Catholics from their own lips, that I might not impute to them what they might not avow themselves. In this design I addressed myself to several ecclesiastics, and, according to my custom of adapting my conversation to each one's profession, I entered on the topic of religion; but they had more piety than light, and seeing me, a determined Protestant, they condemned me without informing me, and we parted equally discontented—they with my attachment to my errors, and I with their zeal, which did not appear to be according to knowledge. On the whole, my only intention was to learn their opinions—not to be disabused of my own; and I thought of nothing more than to satisfy my curiosity. But, thanks to that admirable Providence which made all conduce to my good, as the desire of traveling had led me to the centre of light, without my knowledge, so the desire of instructing myself brought me to the knowledge of the truth without my intention. After having often sought for an opportunity of conversing with some person well informed, both able and willing to instruct me thoroughly in the Catholic doctrine, I met with two ecclesiastics in a place which I was accustomed to frequent. I entered into conversation with them, and declared who I was and what I wanted. At that time I thought with respect to the Jesuits, as most other Protestants do; but yet I told them I should be glad to form an acquaintance with some of them. "I know," said I, "that they are cunning, designing men, but they are celebrated for their learning; and while

I profit by their lights, I will carefully guard myself against their subtlety."

The two persons with whom I was then conversing were of the Society of Jesus. My frankness did not displease them; they declared themselves what they were, adding that they would not undertake to give me the instructions I desired, but would refer me to an able man, who could satisfy my inquiries. In effect they introduced me to one of their brethren, who was well known in Rome, and much distinguished for his learning and piety. "Sir," said I, when introduced to the gentleman, "I may possibly have conceived some false notions of your religion, as all the knowledge I have of it is taken from the report of its enemies; if this be the case, I wish to be undeceived, for I would not entertain a prejudice against any person—not even against the devil. Yet do not think of converting me, for certainly you will not succeed."

This blunt introduction did not prevent him from receiving me with a gentleness and affability which could, only be the effect of true charity. He consented to have some conferences on religion. At first, he exposed, in order, all the articles of the Catholic doctrine, which exposition lasted some days. I listened with attention, and without interrupting him; but, on my return home, never failed to set down in writing the difficulties and arguments which seemed to combat each one of these dogmas and articles. Though many difficulties occurred to my mind, I could not but re-

mark a wonderful harmony through the whole system of the Catholic religion, and wisdom which seemed to have something divine. When he finished his exposition, I proposed, in my turn, my difficulties and doubts; and we spent about three months in discussing these articles. I was oftentimes at a loss for a reply because I was candid in the discussion, and sincerely meant to instruct myself, and not to cavil; yet many obscurities and embarrassments still remained, which I was anxious to remove; and as this respectable man could only give me a few leisure hours, and at intervals, to fill up the vacant time between our conferences, I had recourse to another Jesuit who had not less zeal or less knowledge. He began with me in a manner which surprised me: "We will not," said he, "enter on this subject at present; go say the Lord's Prayer thrice, and return to me on such a day."

I could not refrain from smiling at the singularity of this reception, and replied: "I am not yet a member of your church, and already you impose on me a penance!" We parted; but reflecting afterwards that prayer, far from misleading, must be of real service to me, and that a religion which teaches to begin by prayer an inquiry into its tenets, must be confident that they are established on solid proof. I complied with what he had prescribed, and met him on the day appointed. I was already acquainted with the Catholic doctrine; he had nothing more to do than to clear up those points concerning which I still had my doubts. As I proposed my difficulties on each of

these heads, he pointed out the passages in the best theologians and controvertists, where they are treated at large, he procured me their works, and I read them with attention. I had an opportunity of examining thoroughly each one of the articles contested between Protestants and Catholics, and of weighing the reasons which the latter alleged to support their sentiments. I derived likewise much help from an Augustinian friar, to whom I addressed myself at the same time. He took particular pains to show me the difference which Catholics make between articles of faith and simple opinions which the Church permits to be treated in schools without either adopting or rejecting them. This distinction threw a light on the subject, and contributed greatly to put clearness in my ideas. For Protestants, by blending these two objects, are accustomed to create confusion in the whole system. There is a perfect unity of faith among Catholics, it is true that these different opinions on many undecided points. It is from mixing together these two things, which are so widely different, that our adversaries take occasion to attribute to *faith* what only belongs to free and indifferent *opinions*.

The care which I thus took to consult several doctors proved doubly useful to me; for at the same time that I profited by the lights of each of them, I had an opportunity to remark that they agreed perfectly in matters of faith, which indeed must be *one*, as truth is *one*. This uniformity, which has subsisted among Catholics through all ages, made a lively

impression on me, because I had never discovered it among Protestants. I had been connected with the heads of our sects; I had often conversed with them; I knew their sentiments; there were not two among them who agreed in the most essential articles; what is more, there was not one who had not varied in his doctrine. I recollected that one of our most celebrated preachers once made the same declaration to me. "When I preached in such a place," said he, "I passed for heterodox; I was so at that time, for I had very erroneous sentiments; but I have changed since; and were I to preach there at present my doctrine would be judged pure and orthodox. But this is common to all our preachers; I do not know one who has not, like myself, varied in his doctrine." This declaration made no impression on me at the time he was speaking; but it has occurred since, and has given rise to many reflections,—another proof which verifies the common saying that good or evil principles imbibed in youth produce sooner or later their effect.

This instability of our leading men in their doctrine cause me much pain; I saw that it was an inevitable consequence of the fundamental principle of Protestants, which constitutes each one the judge of his own belief. By this principle there can be no fixed rule of faith. It is this which causes the eternal contradictions among themselves, and the frequent variation of each of them in their doctrine. I had endeavored to conciliate their systems, but could find no

other way than by supposing it sufficed to believe in Jesus Christ, and to intend to honor God; but I soon found that this method, with which I was much pleased, tended equally to reconcile the most opposite and monstrous sects; I consequently from day to day gave myself greater scope, and fixed no bounds to the liberty of thinking. I had friends among the Quakers, the Anabaptists, the Arminians, and others, and in a short time I should have adopted a system of toleration in its greatest extent.

Protestants vainly pretend that they admit Scripture for the rule of their faith, since they acknowledge no living authority to determine its sense; since each one is suffered to give it a private interpretation, it is impossible to convince them of error; and when the Socinian, for instance, says that he cannot find in Scripture a demonstrative proof of the Divinity of Jesus Christ, no one has a right to require that he should believe this dogma, or to condemn him because he rejects it. This principle goes farther, and leads the man who reasons justly to an indifference of all religion, and saps the very foundation of Christianity by establishing the private judgment of each individual the supreme arbiter of his creed.

This reflection and a thousand others which occurred, had not, at that time, all the effect which they ought to have produced; however, in the end they did not a little contribute to open my eyes to the truth. My researches had already carried me much farther than I had designed; at first I had only intend-

ed to form an exact knowledge of the Catholic doctrine, and I was insensibly come to a state that I discovered nothing in it but what was reasonable. When I began my inquiry I had not the least suspicion that my own sect was false. I already found it deficient, and had my doubts, though I was very far from being determined to abandon it. The prejudices in which I had been educated had still too much influence over my mind, and my heart was not yet disposed to make the sacrifice which this change required. I thought I had done a great deal by resolving to take with me to America the best works of controversy which had been written by Catholics, and to read them on my return, with the determination of then changing my religion if, after mature reflection, I could not answer their arguments, for I was resolved, whatever proof was brought against me, not to make my objurations at Rome, for fear of taking a precipitate step.

Providence, ever watchful of me, did not suffer these delays which might have been fatal, but ordered various events which hastened my conversion. A work of Father Segneri on "Guardian Angels," fell at that time into my hands. This pious belief that each of us has a tutelar angel, the witness of all his actions, was not new to me; it had been inspired into me from my infancy, but till then had little or no influence on my conduct. The perusal of this work removed the impressions which had formerly been given me on this subject. I reflected on my past life; I reproached

myself for having so often failed in the respect which I owed to my Guardian Angel, and I formed a resolution to be careful in future to avoid everything which could displease him. This attention to preserve myself from sin undoubtedly contributed to my conversion; at least it removed an obstacle to the grace which God was about to bestow.

Such was my situation when the death of Venerable Labre, and the miracles which were said to have been obtained through his intercession, began to make noise at Rome, and to become the subject of every conversation. Notwithstanding the instructions which I had received, and the lights which I had acquired, I was nowise disposed to credit the public reports concerning this truly extraordinary person. Of all my prejudice against Catholics, the deepested rooted was a formal disbelief of the miraculous facts which are said to have happened among them. I had been brought up in this persuasion common to all Protestants, who never having been able to attain the gift of miracles, like the fox in the fable, disdain it, and deny its existence. Not content with denying those which were published at that time. I made them the subject of my raillery, and, in the coffee-houses passed some very unbecoming jests on the servant of God, with whose poverty and uncleanliness I was shocked; and on this head I went further than any even of my Protestant friends. However, the number and weight of the evidences increasing daily, I thought it was my duty to examine the matter myself. I frequently con-

versed with the confessor of the deceased, from whom I learned a part of his life. I visited four persons who were said to have been miraculously cured. I was convinced by my own eyes of the state in which they then were; I questioned them concerning the state in which they had been; I informed myself of the nature and continuance of the illness with which they had been attacked, and the circumstances of their cures, which had been operated in an instant. I collected the evidence of those to whom they were known; and after all these informations, made with the greatest care, I was fully convinced that the reality of each one of these miracles was at least as well proved as the most authentic facts. One of these persons, a nun in the Convent of Saint Appolonia, had burst a blood vessel. She daily grew weaker and weaker for the space of eighteen months; and at length was so reduced that she could bear no nourishment. She invoked Venerable Labre; took with a lively faith a draught into which one of his relics had been dipped, and was cured in an instant. The same day she went to choir with the rest of the religious, ate without feeling any pain, and with ease performed the most painful offices of the convent. This was attested by the superior and six other nuns of the same community. I often saw the nun who had been cured, spoke to her, and, found her in perfect health and strength. Not content with these proofs, I visited the physician who had attended her during the whole course of her illness; he confirmed all that the com-

munity had said, and added that he was ready to take his oath on the Gospel that the illness was naturally incurable. I continued to see the nun during the rest of my stay at Rome, that is, for about four months. I had time to convince myself that her cure was lasting, and at my departure I left her in perfect health.

Persuaded that there was something supernatural in these cures, I could not refrain from turning my thoughts on myself, and from considering the risk I ran by remaining in my own sect. These reflections involved me in much perplexity; I can hardly express the violent state in which I then was. Truth appeared to me on every side; but it was combated by all the prejudices which I had acquired from my infancy. I felt all the force of the arguments which the Catholics oppose to the Protestant doctrine; but I had not the courage to yield; I clearly saw that the Catholic Church is established on innumerable and unanswerable proofs, and that her replies to the reproaches of Protestants are solid and satisfactory; but that I must abjure errors in which I had been brought up, and which I had preached to others; I was a minister in my own sect, and I must renounce my state and my fortune; I was tenderly attached to my family, and I must incur their indignation. Interests so dear kept me back; in a word, my understanding was convinced, but my heart was not changed.

I was in these circumstances—fluctuating and un-

determined, when a little book, entitled "Manifesto di un Caraliero Christiano Convertito alla Religione Catholica," (which it would be good to translate into several languages, and to spread wherever there are Protestants), was put into my hands. The author gives an historical account of his conversion, and briefly discusses the points which are controverted between Catholics and Protestants. He places in the beginning a prayer which was communicated to him by a Catholic to invoke the light of the Holy Ghost, and which the reader, perhaps will not be sorry to see.

"Almighty and eternal God, Father of mercy, Savior of mankind, I humbly entreat Thee by Thy sovereign goodness to enlighten my mind, and to touch my heart, that by true faith, hope and charity, I may live and die in the true religion of Jesus Christ. I am sure that as there is but one true God, so there can be but one faith, one religion, one way of salvation, and that every other way which is opposite to this can only lead to endless misery. It is this faith, O my God, which I earnestly desire to embrace, in order to save my soul. I protest, therefore, before Thy divine Majesty, and I declare by all Thy divine attributes, that I will follow that religion which Thou shalt show me to be true; and that I will abandon, at whatever cost, that in which I shall discover error and falsehood. I do not deserve, it is true, this favor, on account of the greatness of my sins, for which I have a profound sorrow because they offended a God so

good, so great, so holy and worthy of my love; but what I do not deserve, I hope to obtain from Thy infinite mercy, and I conjure Thee to grant through the merits of the Precious Blood which was shed for us poor sinners by Thy only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Amen."

When I received this book I had a secret presentiment that it would give me the finishing stroke, and it was with extreme difficulty that I could prevail on myself to peruse it. My soul, was as it were, rent by two contrary emotions. What combats, what assaults did I not at that time endure! I cast my eyes over the prayer, but could not prevail upon myself to say it. I wished to be enlightened; yet feared being too much so. My temporal interest, and a thousand other motives, crowded upon my mind, and counterbalanced the salutary impressions of grace. At length the interest of eternal salvation prevailed. I threw myself on my knees, I excited myself to say the prayer with the greatest sincerity I was capable of, and the violent agitation of my soul with the conflicts it had sustained drew from me an abundance of tears.

I began then to read the book, which is a short exposition of the principal proofs which establish the truth of the Catholic religion. The whole of those different proofs which till then I had only viewed separately—so many rays of light, collected as it were into one centre—made a lively impression on my mind. Besides, I did not make the same resistance to

divine grace as formerly; God spoke to my heart at the same time that He enlightened my understanding, and gave me grace to surmount the obstacles which had hitherto retarded me. I had not entirely finished the book, when I exclaimed: "My God, I promise to become a Catholic!" The same day I declared my intention to the family with whom I lodged; it gave them joy, for they were truly pious. I went in the evening to the coffee-house, where I imparted my change to all my Protestant friends; and to repair, as much as I could, the scandal which I had given, I defended the sanctity of Venerable Labre, and declared that I had more proofs of the truth of his miracles than I would require for any fact whatever. Moreover, not to be ashamed of Jesus Christ, I invited a great number of friends to be the witnesses of my abjuration. Many lamented my weakness, others made a jest of it; but God, who called me to the faith, supported me, and I have a firm confidence that He will support me to my last breath.

I must acknowledge that before my abjuration I had struggles for some time with my imagination respecting the worship of the Blessed Virgin and of the saints. I had nevertheless been sufficiently instructed on this article, and did not doubt but that it was profitable to employ with the Son the intercession of His Holy Mother, and that far from doing an injury by honoring and loving her whom He had so tenderly loved Himself, it was the means of honoring Him the more; yet my ancient prejudices returned and

disturbed my mind in spite of myself. The reproach of idolatry, which I had a thousand times brought against Catholics on this subject, still alarmed me, though I knew it to be ill-founded. I resembled those persons, who, in their infancy, having had their imagination strongly impressed with the ridiculous stories of apparitions, at a riper age involuntary shudder when the same ideas recur, in spite of their reason, which wholly disowns them. I was obliged to offer violence to myself, and when I began to invoke the Blessed Virgin—I did it with trembling. I first addressed myself to God, protesting that I had no other design than to honor Him, and that I desired to do it more perfectly by the intercession of His Blessed Mother, entreating to Him not to impute to me idolatrous intentions, which I disavowed with all my soul. Then addressing myself to the Blessed Virgin: "Oh tender Mother," said I, "if it be lawful for me to implore Thy succor, help me in the miserable state in which I am. It was through Thee that the Savior came to us; it is through Thee that I desire to go to Him. The Scriptures teach me that by Thy means was wrought the first miracle of the evangelical law in the order of grace (the sanctification of St. John the Baptist), and the first in the order of nature (the change of water into wine). Here remains another to be performed; do not refuse to employ Thy credit; I do not deserve it; too long have I not known Thee; but now, though with fear and trembling, I begin to address Thee. Intercede

for me with Thy divine Son." Then, returning to God, "O Lord." said I, "I implore Thy light. Thou hast promised to listen to those who invoke Thee. I do it from the bottom of my heart. Thou art my witness that I seek truth at whatever expense. I can not err in addressing my supplications to Thy Blessed Mother; Thou thyself wouldst be the cause of my error."

Confidence and tranquility were the fruits of this prayer. From that time I have always had recourse to the Blessed Virgin, and I am confident that I have received grace through her intercession; gratitude obliges me to make this acknowledgment. I endeavor to join in every institution which tends to her honor, and I have pledged myself, and study as much as can depend on me, to extend the devotion of this dear Mother of God.

A very natural reflection here occurs: can God suffer a person to be deceived in the choice of a religion when, after exact watchfulness over his own conduct, after fervent prayer, after long and toilsome investigation, he determined to embrace it at the expense of all that is most dear to him on earth—family, state, fortune reputation? If this religion be false, may he not say, with a celebrated divine, "Lord, it is though who hast deceived me." This reflection will require a new degree of force, if I add the prodigious change which is made in me by conversion. I hesitated to publish it; but think it my duty so to do, in order to glorify the mercy of God, and to render homage to

the Catholic religion, which I have now the happiness to profess.

What a difference between my present and former state! My thoughts, my tastes, my views, are wholly changed. I do not know myself again. As soon as I had taken my determination, I renounced the profane studies in which I had hitherto been employed; I left my books half read; I parted with those which belonged to me. From that time my passions have had little influence over me; my projects of ambition and settlement in the world are entirely laid aside. I have no pretensions on earth; I take no pleasure but in the things of God; I feel within my heart a peace which I had never known—not as formerly, the deceitful security of a stiffled conscience, which presumes on the mercy of God, without seeing the danger to which it was exposed; it is to the sweet confidence of a child who finds himself within the arms of a father, and has reason to hope that nothing can tear him from them, notwithstanding the dangers with which he is surrounded. Yes, this religion is adapted to the heart; however powerful and solid the proofs are which convince me that it is the true religion of Jesus Christ, the satisfaction, the pure joy which accompanies it, is for me another kind of proof, not less persuasive. The truths which I had most difficulty in believing are those in which I now find the greatest consolation. The mystery of the Eucharist, which appeared to me so incredible, is become an ever flowing source of spiritual delight; con-

fession, which I had considered as an insupportable yoke, seems infinitely sweet, by the tranquility which it produces in the soul.

Oh, if Protestants and unbelievers could taste those sweets which are felt at the foot of the altar, they would soon change their sentiments! Oh, that I could be heard by them all! I would cry out to them: "Taste and see how sweet and good is the Lord to those who serve him in the holy society which He has formed Himself, which He verifies by His spirit."

This is the prevailing wish, this is the only desire of my heart; to extend as much as lies in my power the dominion of the true faith, which is now my joy and comfort, I desire nothing more. For this purpose I wish to return to my own country, in hopes, notwithstanding my unworthiness, to be the instrument of the conversion of my countrymen; and, such is my conviction of the truth of the Catholic Church, and my gratitude for the signal grace of being called to the true faith, that I would willingly seal it with my blood, if God would grant me this favor, and I doubt not but He would enable me to do it.

I entreat all those who will peruse this narrative to pray with fervor the Father of Lights and the God of Mercies to bless the designs of His unworthy servant, and to open an easy access to the Faith in my country, and to cause it to shoot forth and to fructify in a land in which it has been as yet but imperfectly known. Perhaps—and I dwell with pleasure on the

consoling thought,—perhaps, I say, He who raises up and casts down empires as He pleases, who does all for His elect, and for the interest of His Church, has only permitted and brought to an end the surprising Revolution* of which we have been witnesses, in order to accomplish some great design, and much more happy revolution in the order of grace. Amen.

The Independence of the United States of America.

THE END.

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